

There have been many lives written of Rembrandt containing many more rich and colourful illustrations than may be found in this little book; but no apology is needed, we feel, whatever has gone before, for translating into the English language what has been acclaimed on the continent of Europe as a biographical event.

The chorus of praise which has gone up from Madame de Beaufort's native Holland is quite remarkable. Professor J. Q. van Regteren Altena of Amsterdam University calls it 'masterly'. Professor Bomhoff of Leiden University says 'It is the best introduction to his personality and his life that I have ever read'. Professor Banning of Leiden University describes the author as 'our cleverest living biographer'. Professor Henry S. Lucas of the University of Washington speaks of 'viewing Rembrandt from within. Historians all too often neglect the inner spirituality of painters and poets. They are all too concerned with political and economic realities'.

(continued on back flap)

REMBRANDT

HENRIETTE L. T. DE BEAUFORT
(*Translated by George Clark*)

REMBRANDT



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. . . les choses corporelles ne sont qu'une image des spirituelles, et Dieu a représenté les choses invisibles dans les visibles.

PASCAL

It is a pleasure for me to dedicate the English translation of my *Life of Rembrandt* to the eminent author C. V. Wedgwood. My book might be regarded as an expression of her belief that: 'The behaviour of men as individuals is more interesting to me than their behaviour as groups or classes. History can be written with this bias as well as another: it is neither more, nor less, misleading. The essential is to recognise that it answers only one set of questions in only one way.'*

* C. V. Wedgwood, *The King's Peace 1637-1641*. Collins, St. James' Place. London, 1955.

I. LIFE

ON JULY 15th, 1606, three years after the death of Elizabeth I of England, the year after the Gunpowder Plot, the year in which Shakespeare wrote Macbeth, Rembrandt van Rijn was born at Leiden. His mother, Neeltjen Willemsd. van Zuytbroeck was married in St. Peter's church to Harmen Gerritsz. van Rijn, a well-to-do miller in the Weddesteeg, with a private garden a little way outside the town as well. His son Rembrandt was the fifth child; one more, a girl, followed him.

The parents must soon have noticed how keen he was to learn. His brother Adriaan became a shoemaker, but changed later to the miller's trade. Another brother learned the baker's business. Rembrandt was not to learn a trade but to attend the Latin school, where, in those days, the most thorough teaching was given. The scholars learned first and foremost Latin, the universal language, from a grammar, and Latin dialogues from a book by Cordier and another by Erasmus. When the pupils reached the highest class they knew their Terence, Vergil, Livy and Horace and were familiar with Ovid's poetry. They were also expected to be able to speak Latin with fair fluency. The Latin school was on a Christian basis; the last sentence in the Latin grammar read: 'Farewell in the name of Christ, your guide in your studies.' The school day began and ended with a prayer and Scripture reading was never missed. The boys were

Life

admonished to go to church twice rather than once on Sundays and to listen attentively enough to be able to give an account of the sermon.

When the youngest son of Harmen Gerritsz. left school, he was enrolled as a student in the newly-founded Leiden University: '20 Mai 1620. *Rembrandus Hermannii Leydensis an. 14 stud. litt apud Parentes.*'¹ He was the first child of the Van Rijn family to become a student. The parents no doubt did this deliberately in order to fit their clever son for responsible work with the municipal authorities. It was the first time they had not set a son to a trade. Orlers, the mayor of Leiden, wrote in his chronicle: '... so that being of an age to do so, he might serve and advance the town and the community with his knowledge.'²

The boy was a bare fourteen years old. Though eager for knowledge, he was not much good at university studies, but showed other aptitudes. The mayor noted: '... and had no desire or inclination for it, while his natural impulses were all towards the art of painting and drawing.' He soon left the University for a place in the studio of his fellow-townsmen, Jacob, son of the mayor of Leiden, Van Swanenburgh, to whom he was apprenticed and able thoroughly to learn the artist's trade: mixing paints, the subtle knowledge of binders and varnish; cleaning palettes, pencils and brushes; stretching and putting on new canvases. Swanenburgh certainly had no great talent, but he knew something of the outside world. He had been

¹ Dr. C. Hofstede de Groot, *Die Urkunden*.

² J. Orlers, *Beschrijvinge der Stadt Leyden*.

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to Italy of course—how could he not?—and besides the knowledge acquired there he had also brought home a Neapolitan model as his wife.

Rembrandt, an intelligent lad, was anxious to get on. It was clearly his destiny, but he wanted to do it in his own way and according to his own views. At seventeen or so he left Leiden for Amsterdam to work in the studio of Pieter Lastman, the painter of whom he had heard so much from his fellow-townsmen, Lievens, who had worked for some time under him. A remarkable urge impelled Rembrandt. He had not been six months with Lastman when he went back to Leiden and set up as a painter, living with his parents. He seems to have had no lack of pluck. He worked with Lievens for seven years as a painter in Leiden and made a name for himself far beyond the town boundaries.

There was naturally the risk that the young painter would not find a market for his work. One day he heard of somebody in The Hague who was interested in it. He took a panel under his arm and walked the whole way from Leiden to The Hague. It was a great piece of luck, for he sold his painting for a hundred guilders. Elated at his success, he considered how to make the return journey in a way suitable to his means and position. On foot again? Such a rich man! By barge? No, too cheap and common. So he decided to take a coach to Leiden. The coachman and the passengers pulled up at 't Huis den Deil and got out. Rembrandt sat alone in the coach with his full purse. The horses, sensing there was no-one to

stop them, bolted for their stable at Leiden. They went through the gate they were used to driving through and stopped at the inn the driver was used to stop at. Rembrandt got out unhurt, pleased at having covered the distance between The Hague and Leiden so quickly, and hurried home.

It was in this period that no less a person than the Prince's secretary, Constantine Huygens, visited the two painters. Huygens, a gifted man, always perceptive of what was good and new, interested in literally everything that science and art had to offer, had heard of these two, whom he already called famous. He himself was a favourite of Fortune. He spoke Italian like an educated Italian, French like a Parisian and had even been praised by Descartes for his ready understanding. He was one of those Renaissance natures who did everything well that they attempted and could find time for everything. He played the lute, the theorbo and the organ, and followed the development of music and painting. In spite of his onerous position he cultivated his own poetic talent with devotion and seriousness. He was therefore somewhat surprised that young men of such simple origin had already advanced so far.

'Of my two young friends, one has an embroiderer, a man of the people, and the other a miller for a father, certainly not of the same stamp as his son.'¹ Huygens noticed at once that they did not live and work by the favour of any master, but had gone entirely their own way.

¹ Constantine Huygens' Youth.

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They were so young, though, so beardless still, that he called them overgrown boys rather than young men. He could not say enough of their work. He called the first impression superficial, but thought he could already say that Rembrandt was a greater seeker after style and had more life than Lievens, though the latter ventured more on large subjects: 'a certain grandeur of invention and of bold subjects and figures.' Perhaps we can read into this that Rembrandt was already trying to get away from baroque, by the spirit of which he was still held fast and which had enthralled him so in his earliest years.

Huygens saw more. He remarked that Rembrandt was entirely absorbed in his own work, and concentrated within a narrow compass, on a small painting therefore, but was thus able to obtain an effect that others attempted in vain on large canvases. Rembrandt's treatment of the repentant Judas, bringing back the pieces of silver to the high priest, the gesture of the despairing Judas, 'who rages, groans, implores forgiveness but does not hope for it or express hope in his face; his haggard features, his torn-out hair, his ragged clothes, his twisted arms, his hands clenched together till they bleed . . . '—over this work of Rembrandt's Huygens goes into raptures. ' . . . I want it to be known by all the ignorant people who persist in saying—I have spoken against this elsewhere—that nowadays nothing can be said or done that has not been said or done before in ancient times.' Huygens means here the slavish imitators of classical art who looked askance at everything modern. The cultivated courtier was astounded

that a miller's son, who had hardly been outside the walls of his native town, had been able to accomplish such work.

Huygens did not stop there: he criticised the young painters—and this point is most important—for electing to remain in the country of their birth and considering a journey to Italy unnecessary. He thought that they were too self-satisfied, because they 'so far do not think Italy so important, that it is necessary to sacrifice a few months for a visit to that country. . .'

The secretary must have had some sharp words with the two young people about this, for he constantly returned to the subject. He said that the reason they gave was only a pretext and that they were pretending not to have enough time in these years of work. There were buyers and collectors among the kings and princes on this side of the Alps, so why should they go to Italy? If painters wanted to get to know the Italians' work they could find many of the best examples outside Italy. Neither Rembrandt nor Lievens was able to persuade Huygens, the Lord of Zuilichem, who had himself lived in Venice, by these arguments. The cosmopolitan statesman, with his world-wide interests, could not get over his amazement at their singular obstinacy, though this made no difference to the praise he lavished on them for their industry, which he called miraculous. They filled every minute of their time and with the pleasures and distractions of youth they had little or nothing to do. They had shut themselves off from the world so much that Huygens, somewhat archly, compares the two in this respect with old men, full of

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years, who already know that all is vanity. He adds, paternally, that they should consider their constitutions which, it appeared to him, already lacked stamina owing to their sedentary lives.

This detailed account by such a man of culture is important, but it seems to me nonetheless that Huygens has not entirely perceived the real grounds for Rembrandt's and Lievens' refusal to make an artist's journey to Italy. Perhaps the two painters concealed their true reasons from their distinguished visitor. Their motives were deep and perhaps the young painters did not themselves recognise the inmost stirrings of their own hearts. Rembrandt was all energy and vehement impetuosity: one has only to study the youthful portrait of about 1630, now in the Mauritshuis at The Hague. A journey of adventure, southwards over the Alps, such as hundreds of his fellow-countrymen, students of medicine, science, law, and young painters, had made before him would surely have fascinated him. The universities of Siena, Turin, Bologna and above all of Padúa, supported by the powerful state of Venice, and the painters' studios of Florence, Venice and Rome were full of young men from the Republic. Why should not such a trip, for months, perhaps years, full of surprises, have been a special attraction to these two courageous and enterprising men?

It may well have been that the national consciousness, that had been fermenting everywhere in the Netherlands during the Twelve Years' Truce, stimulated these inhabitants of Leiden—the town which could congratulate itself

on withstanding the Spanish siege—to follow their development within their own frontiers and proudly to reject a journey abroad, with all the impressions it would make upon them. Can we call them ‘self-satisfied’, as Huygens did? I should hesitate to. I am more inclined to see here a rather emotional, even impetuous, prejudice in favour of their own surroundings and culture, militating against any enthusiasm for Italian culture.

Rembrandt’s younger contemporary, M. de Piles, says of him: ‘avec le lait il avoit sucé le goût de son pays.’¹

These young men knew the full fury of the Spanish persecution only by hearsay; they had not experienced fearful warfare or bitter exile. They possessed an ordered state, firmly established town authorities, and it was their pleasure and their desire to play their part in their new community.

The younger generation was permeated with the consciousness of living in the country that had been victorious over the most powerful monarchy in Europe, the Hapsbourgs. Other great events had lately occurred: the conflict between Prince Maurits and Oldenbarnevelt; the Synod of Dordrecht and its decision to translate the Bible. They had created a spiritual climate of fervid self-confidence and a strong feeling of self-esteem. What was happening or had happened on the far side of the Alps was not of particular interest to the rising generation. The important thing was to steer one’s own course.

It can be seen that Rembrandt is particularly on his

¹Roger de Piles, *Abrégé de la Vie des Peintres*.

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guard against Italian influence in his work; there is a passion in him, an irresistible driving force, to go against the trends of custom and fashion. He sought inspiration solely in himself or his immediate surroundings. His models are again and again his mother, father, sister, brothers. He was bursting with thoughts and ideas, imagination and plans. Perhaps he could control, regulate and develop the inner life if he kept away from too many outside influences. It was an act of self-preservation, that he stubbornly refused, even against the advice of an eminent man like Huygens, to cross the Alps. One thing was clear as crystal to him: he wanted to go his own way.

Diligently he examined and studied pictures, in his time the principal means of cultural exchange. He was not averse from making use of existing sources, learning much from them and letting his talent mature; but from the first he refused stubbornly to follow anyone or anything, any fashion or tradition, let alone to identify himself with them. He was the genuine type of the self-taught man who cannot help following his own path. Centuries after him, with all schools and teaching organised and knowledge and development served up according to a well-arranged plan, the absolutely self-taught man will disappear. To understand Rembrandt we must understand what sort of person a self-educated man is. In any case he is a lonely one. He has few colleagues or friends, for no-one has travelled his road. He is all too often ignorant of what others know, but what he knows he has acquired in his own way. He can work and plod along with incredible

perseverance. This was fully admitted by Constantine Huygens, that extremely gifted, talented scholar. He was consequently courtier enough merely to express great surprise, with regard to the point of dispute about Italy, at the self-sufficiency which Rembrandt had shown. Nevertheless he did not hesitate to give unstinted admiration to the two young painters. 'A famous couple of young men from Leiden', he calls them in his notes.

In the time he was at Leiden Rembrandt painted canvases which have become well-known, as well as several self-portraits; this was a series which he was to extend all his life, in which he searches assiduously for his own inner promptings or plays with his own capabilities. Sometimes he is half disguised in dress and with an expression not false but still imposed and transitory. He was already choosing biblical subjects such as occupied him in his later years: Christ at Emmaus, David and Saul, various moments in the life of St. Paul—in prison, in his chamber, studying by night; writing an epistle: Judas giving back the pieces of silver; the Holy Family; Simeon in the Temple; also drawings from the Metamorphoses; Ceres and Stello; his father and, above all, his mother, time and again.

At Leiden Rembrandt was working up his reputation as a painter. No other than the fifteen-year-old Gerard Dou became his pupil.

Rembrandt mastered the language of baroque in the first period, the powerful and lively expression of a form which since the Council of Trent had become general. It is the art which speaks pre-eminently to the crowd, which

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makes and wants to make an impression. It is full of playful facility, light and lively; it cheers the war-weary nations, it succeeds in dispelling their melancholy. It is a style in which a man of forceful talent such as Peter Paul Rubens found himself; in which his love of life and grandeur of scale had a free hand; but it was a style in which Rembrandt could eventually no longer feel at home. Huygens was right then, the young man from Leiden sought more after fervour within a small compass, even though one part of his nature was still greatly fascinated by the attention which baroque pays to gesture. It tries to get at the inner meaning of movement. Could there be a more delightful task for a young and versatile artist? Terror and amazement, flight and remorse, desire and cunning are surely always expressed in surprising movements and gesticulations. The raised arm, the clenched fist, the downcast man, the man in fetters—they are all breakneck, distorted positions which make great demands on the delineator.

The portraits of his mother are, however, from the start, out of quite another world. Whether he painted, drew or etched her, there is no sign of baroque. They are quiet and remarkably deep, these portraits.

Rembrandt's father died in 1630. At Cassel¹ there is a portrait in oils of him from about 1631. Was it painted by his son after his death? It is remarkable, because the fine face of Harmen Gerritsz. has a lifeless look and Rembrandt

¹ Landesmuseum, Cassel

has succeeded in delineating the expression of the face with the nearness of death in it.

Lievens wanted to see more than just the Netherlands and went to London. In 1631 at twenty-five years old Rembrandt went from Leiden to Amsterdam. He was never to leave it again. There was a greater future there for a painter: above all he would get more commissions for portraits, and that was an incentive, for people on canvas enthralled him more than any other subject.

In the autumn of that year another good and great citizen of the Netherlands crossed the frontiers, in the ardent hope that the Republic would admit him; the States of Holland disappointed this hope and Hugo Grotius went into exile again.

Amsterdam was a town of fiery enthusiasms, for with the neighbouring towns of Haarlem, Leiden, Gouda, The Hague and Rotterdam it was creating a period which later generations would call by the inspiring name of the Golden Age. 'Golden' for its money and 'golden' for the brilliant and enduring content of its culture. Amsterdam was one of the few towns in the Netherlands which had not known a siege during the troubled years of the Spanish wars. It was therefore alarmingly rigorous in its behaviour and thoroughly healthy. It had the prime necessity for welfare and prosperity: vitality. Like a second Venice, its power was rooted in the development of its trade. Commerce, especially transport trade in flax, grain and wine, was flourishing. There was the East India Company, into

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and out of which flowed streams of energy and skill, keen enterprise and endurance. There were the long voyages to the West Indies, Persia, India and Japan. Barter, finance and transport were the arteries of Amsterdam's existence. The scholar added quietly that there were few people living there whose aim was not profit-making.

Its ships sailed the oceans, its harbour was a forest of the masts of the many galleons and frigates, caracks and fly-boats, cock-boats and caravels. Seafaring meant adventure, privateering heroic exploits. The dauntless spirit of the merchant fleet infected the authorities of the town: their rule was at once far-seeing and fearless.

Art and commerce are closely connected, for what the one creates the other can pay for. If trade expands, art can grow and flourish all the more undisturbed. It was a propitious moment in European history: Dutch shipping now saw its chance to repel the Hanseatic League, exhausted after the Thirty Years' War. Bruges, Ypres and even Antwerp had passed the climax of their greatness. Those who promoted trade in Amsterdam belonged to the ruling class, and those who ruled in Amsterdam controlled the Netherlands.

When Rembrandt passed through the city gate the town was already a good deal larger than when he first got to know it during his six months' work at Lastman's studio, barely eight years before. New districts were constantly being added. Hendrik de Keyser was the creative builder. Town-planning was being carried out in the grand



manner. Ring after ring of canals, lined with stately houses for the rising patrician class were being created; they fanned out at two points right to the waters of the IJ. On the inland side the town was surrounded by wall and rampart, adorned by proud, well-built gates, the Leiden, the Utrecht and the Weesp gates. Within these gates lived and traded not only Europe but Asia, America and Africa too.

An Englishman who visited the town in 1619 summed up its sights—the tower of the Old Church with its carillon that could be both heard and seen; the Rasp House; the Orphanage; the Arquebusiers' Butts: but the educated were probably more interested in Hondius' bookshop, to see the maps there—real works of art in their accuracy and beauty. Willem Jansz. Blaeu drew them. Amsterdam was the world centre for the compilation and printing of maps and atlases. The atlases by Mercator-Hondius, Janssonius and Blaeu were famous among cartographers. Strangers could get good lodgings: there were first-class inns, the Coninck van Swede in Warmoes Street, Hotel de Keyzerskroon in Kalver Street.¹ But the resumé can be prolonged, for there were the extensive bookshops of Hendrik Laurensz., of Louis and Daniel Elzevier; there was the East India House with Peter Vingboons' globe, the fine Admiralty or Prinsenhof, and then, not to be forgotten, the Greenland warehouses with floors so piled with goods that they bent under the weight.

¹ John Howell, *Familiar Letters*, 1619.

This was by no means everything, for in Amsterdam there was something to everyone's liking. Curiosities of nature could be examined at Jacob Swammerdam's, the chemist's; there were German and Portuguese synagogues to visit, and those who cared for horses could peep through the great doors of the stables by the Amstel. They saw the tow-horses of the Amstel and other rivers, hundreds and hundreds of animals stabled together. The towing barge was cheaper than the cart, and an Englishman travelling in the Netherlands remarked, ' . . . and one Horse shall draw, in a Boat, more than fifty can do by a cart . . . '¹

Shipping caused all kinds of subsidiary trades to flourish, for there were not only the shipbuilders, but the caulkers and ropemakers, the ship's carpenters, the makers of sails, instruments and maps. When a ship was taken out of service it was repaired in a dock. Slipway foremen and ship's carpenters enjoyed great respect among the work-people.

Rembrandt took lodgings with the art dealer, Hendrik van Uylenburg, in Breestraat, near the Antonie lock. He realised that he was already a painter of repute. When a lawyer, one Van Zwieten, met him at Uylenburg's and asked him how he was, he answered without hesitation, 'I am, praise God, in good spirits and health.'² In documents about matters of inheritance his brothers were simply

¹ *Late Voyage to Holland*, 1691 (reprinted in the *Harleian Miscellany* 11, 1744) page 576.

² Dr. H. E. van Gelder, *Rembrandt en zijn portret*, Becht, Amsterdam.

designated by their names, but this Van Rijn was 'Sinjeur Rembrandt'.

His many self-portraits, confessions without words, show him in his early Amsterdam years well, even elegantly dressed. He liked dressing up for these pictures, which tell of delight in clothing, gay elegance and smart finery: a dark wide-brimmed hat or gleaming helmet, a soft velvet beret; then again a hat with a feather, gold necklaces, carefully tended hair, a little down on the upper lip. The body and in particular the head take on the pose of the grand gentleman. But whatever the dress and ornaments may be, the look remains pensive and charged with thought. Elegance is not the end, but the means of expressing joy in existence and of not overstressing the introspection that rarely left him. The self-portraits mostly seem to capture the golden moments of his life.

In his work Rembrandt was continuously a serious worker and seeker. His studio must have had patrons, for he was given commission after commission. But he was also working on his own initiative, among other things on the canvas 'Simeon in the Temple'. In 1652 he finished a commission, 'The Anatomy Lesson of Professor Tulp',¹ that gave him a firm reputation overnight. In the year of the Anatomy Lesson he carried out about twenty commissions for portraits.

Nicolaes Tulp, the anatomist, was Praelector Anatomiae in Amsterdam, a well-known member of the surgeons'

guild. Dr. Tulp was a go-ahead, skilful man with imagination out of the common. His real name was Claes Pietersz. He called himself Tulp—why not? A tulip, that celebrated flower, adorned his gable. Five years or so later a tulip bulb was to fetch twenty-four carolus guilders, a price which a Dürer or a Rembrandt print would not bring in by a long way. Pious and prudent authorities warned against the tulip trade, saying that it led to neglect of bona fide commerce: ‘. . . that it is nothing but loose dealing, tending to diversion from other honest and necessary commerce and trade’.¹ Dr. Nicolaes Tulp was one of the city fathers and four times mayor.

On the canvas he demonstrates to seven students the muscles of the left forearm, the so-called flexor perforatus and flexor perforans profundus.² Next to him lies open a book by Vesalius, which must be ‘*De humani corporis fabrica libri septem*, Basileae, 1555’, where on page 159 the muscles of the forearm are illustrated. Tulp is seated, the attentive audience is standing and looking curiously at the dissected arm of the corpse. Tulp wears a black hat, the seven others are bareheaded. One surgeon has in his hand a list of the names of those present: Mathijs Kalkoen, Hartman Hartmansz., Jacob de Witt, Jacob Blok, Frans van Loenen, Jacob Koolvelt and Adriaen Slabran. They are all dressed in black, only De Witt has a waistcoat of dull purple. The

¹ Missive from mayors and rulers of Haarlem to the Court of Holland, April 17, 1637.

² M. W. Hastie, *Rembrandt's Lesson in Anatomy*, Cont. Review, August, 1891.

white ruffs are varied in shape, enhanced by the way some are in shadow, some partly in the light. Tulp's right hand holds a muscle from the left arm of the corpse with an instrument. His right hand is making a most expressive gesture of explanation, in which each finger, half-bent, has a characteristic position. It would be possible to describe the canvas for a long time, the triangular composition, the prone corpse as central point, the dead colour, so drenched in cold light, however, that the skin seems to be alive again; the contrast of the dead head in rigid immobility to the eight faces radiating life.

Dissection was still a young study in Rembrandt's lifetime. Philip II had allowed it, provided only the corpses of condemned criminals were used. Nevertheless there was still considerable opposition to the cutting open of bodies; even Hugo Grotius found it offensive. But the surgeons' guild proceeded undaunted to study anatomy on corpses. Medical experts were people in a dangerous profession. They were held, rightly, in great esteem, for during the many plagues a lot of them fell victim to them in the exercise of their skill. It happened once that a surgeons' guild commissioned a portrait group just as an outbreak of plague occurred. The painting could not be finished, as too many of them succumbed. Rembrandt experienced at least three epidemics of plague in Amsterdam: from 1635-1636, 1655-1656, and the bubonic plague in 1663-1664, which was certainly connected with the plague of rats. Painting a surgeons' guild inevitably meant portraying a group of secret heroes. Rembrandt felt this. But the

heroism that he saw in these men lacks any outward display. Did he understand the inner courage, that never strives after effect?

This Anatomy Lesson was a resounding success. From that moment Rembrandt's position as one of the greatest portraitists and an unusual painter of groups was undisputed; he was an artist who used light and shade in a new, almost mysterious way. It was not only his repute as a painter that grew; he was recognised as a famous etcher and draughtsman. In the same year as the Anatomy Lesson he made, among other etchings, *The Raising of Lazarus*, which he repeated ten years later in the so-called *Small Raising of Lazarus*.

He worked with brush and pencil, with quill and burin, on canvas, wood, copper and paper of all kinds, wrestling with all the possibilities of the material. He was flooded with commissions for portraits. Without help from pupils, it must be supposed, in contrast to Rubens and Van Dyck, purely by fervid industry he produced work after work. As a rule they are cool and sometimes quite amazingly impassive, with great attention to the material, the ruff or the lace collar. The faces must as a rule not only have inspired him very little, they cannot even have interested him. I am thinking here of two portrait studies at Cassel and Vienna,¹ and of the portraits of a man and a woman at Brunswick,² in which the painter's boredom with his models is dominant. The portrait painter who, like

¹ Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

² Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, Brunswick.

Rembrandt, understands his trade, looks for the individual. Rembrandt often could not see an individual in these insipid faces, so he gave his attention to the representation of the clothing. In the Portrait of a Lady¹ contours of the snow-white lace collar and cuffs, the fall of the bracelets, the fan, the bodice ribbon and the necklace are more arrestingly conceived than the spiritless face. It can be seen how the impassive features of someone, to whom nothing had ever happened, irritated him.

Between the Anatomy Lesson and the so-called Night Watch (the Sortie of the Civic Guard) his work was immense, too great to be summed up in an essay. I can only mention here the etchings of J. C. Sylvius, Ferdinand Bol, Menasseh ben Israel, C. Anslo; at the same time there were the etchings, drawings and canvases from the Old and New Testament, the various interpretations of Christ, the landscapes, the animals. At the noonday of his life it is as if his power and his talent would stop at nothing, as if he had time and attention for everything; could begin and complete what he would. How many hours of productive work must his working day have counted!.

In the year of Tulp's Anatomy Lesson and of the High Priest, of the Rat Poison Seller and of Belshazzar's Feast, of the Good Samaritan and the Raising of Lazarus—to mention but a few subjects—Rembrandt met the young and distinguished Saskia van Uylenburg, only twenty years old. She was a Frisian, orphaned, daughter of the late mayor of Leeuwarden, Rombout van Uylenburg, whose

¹ Buckingham Palace, 1641.

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melancholy fame it was to have been a guest at the Prinsenhof just when William the Silent was assassinated. The art dealer, Hendrik van Uylenburg of Amsterdam, was Saskia's cousin. Rembrandt loved and was loved; their romance was born.

In a tender drawing of her—she is wearing a wide hat with flowers, which makes a charming lass of her—Rembrandt scribbled: 'This is a portrait of my wife when she was twenty-one years old, the third day that we were married, the 8th June, 1633.' The Dutch word, which now means 'married', must here mean 'betrothed'. Rembrandt made a mistake in her age. There was not much accuracy about ages and dates then, for in the wedding register of June 10, 1634, Rembrandt entered himself as a year younger than he was. Vanity or carelessness? Undoubtedly the latter. Saskia is entered as twenty-one years old on the wedding day.

Rembrandt's mother, who was certainly not easy to please where marriages were concerned, gave her 'voluntary consent' in a legal document. The ceremony corresponding to the banns took place in Saskia's absence, her cousin by marriage, the minister Jan Cornelis Sylvius, representing her. His portrait was etched by Rembrandt in the same year. Shortly after this ceremony Rembrandt travelled to Friesland to marry in the Reformed Church of St. Anna Parish, chief town of the Bildt polder, which had been drained and dyked in about 120 years earlier. Why were they married here? Possibly Rembrandt's Frisian bride wanted the wedding breakfast at home with her sister

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Hiskje and her brother-in-law Gerrit van Loo, town clerk of Het Bildt. On June 22 the wedding was celebrated in the cruciform church.

This marriage took Rembrandt out of the circle of the small town and unimportant people, to which he belonged, into that of the new ruling patricians. He was related by marriage to two lawyers, an officer and to Dr. Joannes Maccovius, a professor of theology at Franeker. He was a Czech, born at Lobzenice, where Comenius lived. Maccovius was a member of the Moravian sect. It is likely that Rembrandt was in touch with him in intellectual matters. The historical and portrait painter, Wybrand de Geest, painter of the Frisian Nassaus, who had been given the name of the 'Frisian Eagle' in Rome, was married to a distant cousin of Saskia's. He was a Roman Catholic.

Saskia was the wife of Rembrandt's heart and of his desires. His love for her was more stimulating than any wine. With infinite respect and utter affection he painted her time and again. She is far and away the most inspiring model of his realism and of his imagination playing upon reality. His eyes could not have enough of her, his mind never tired of contemplating and re-creating her. He adorned her with everything beautiful he could find in the drawers and cabinets of his collection, with pearls and precious stones, bracelets and necklaces, ear-rings and plumed caps.¹ She is the enduring model which his spring-perfumed love re-created in finery and colour. Another

¹ See the panel in the Staatl. Gemäldegalerie, Cassel.

time she is Flora.¹ Her eyes are rather prominent, with the typical rather timid and dreamy glance of a pregnant woman. Of course she has flowers in her hair and a flowered staff in her hand, a pearl as big as a pea in her ear. Saskia here. Saskia there. The young couple must often have discussed and debated, now and then perhaps bursting into laughter, what embroidery would best show off the bodice, whether the cambric should be starched or not, whether the veil should hang coquettishly or primly, and whether the pink shell of the ear were better adorned with a pearl or with a diamond.

Rembrandt's renown was growing in the years around his marriage. The pupils who steamed in were often little younger than their master. They came from all quarters, Jacob Adriaensz. Backer from Harlingen, Ferdinand Bol from Dordrecht, Govert Flinck from Cleves and many others. The master rented a warehouse on the Bloemgracht; he partitioned it off with canvas and paper, so that each pupil had his own den, '... in order to be able to paint from life without disturbing one another'.²

One day one of the pupils managed to get a young woman in as a nude model. This made the other pupils curious; they crept to the partition in their stockinged feet and found a way of peeping through a crack. It was an interesting sight. Not only was the woman undressed but the painter was also walking about without his clothes. At this moment Rembrandt happened to come into the

¹ Hermitage, Leningrad.

² Houbraken.

warehouse and at once tried, but in vain, to open the door of the partition. He too then looked through the crack and understood the situation. He heard them telling each other that they were like Adam and Eve. He then banged violently on the door with his stick and shouted that as they were naked they would be driven out of Paradise. The door opened an inch or two and the would-be Adam and Eve saw a furious Rembrandt who drove them out of their room with his stick. They were only just able to grab a few clothes, so as not to arrive naked on the street.

In the fifth year of his marriage, in 1639, Rembrandt bought a handsome house in Jodenbreestraat, 'a house and heriditament on the south side of Breestraat, being the second house outwards from St. Tonis' lock'. The house cost 13,000 guilders. He was to put down 1,200 guilders deposit, the rest to follow in instalments. Was this method of buying the beginning of his financial weakness? One is inclined to say so, for afterwards, famous painter as he was, he was never able to cut his coat to suit his cloth. And yet he was not a glutton or a spendthrift; in his best period he was never one for lavish living, nor a heavy drinker. Contemporaries praised his frugal diet; he liked to eat bread and cheese or a herring best. He travelled little: sometimes to Leiden, along or across the shining Haarlem lake; on one occasion to Rotterdam; a stay at Rhenen; but wanderings abroad he had avoided from his youth. What led him astray into money difficulties? In the first place his passion for founding a collection of paintings, engravings, drawings and etchings. He had a

certain haughty contempt for the Renaissance worship of antiquity. His collection, which consisted of everything and anything, he jokingly called his 'antiques'. Besides paintings, drawings and etchings he possessed everything that can be thought of: carpets, weapons, stuffed animals, armour, plumes and feathers, satins and velvets, brocade and lace, fur and gorgets, ivory and copper, bearskin caps and helmets, precious stones and precious metals of every alloy. As an inveterate collector he was never satisfied; year after year he extended his collection, in texture or in colour, in brilliant or in matt surfaces. It was not his house but his models that he adorned from his store and decorated with jewels and gems to satisfy his fancy. The models of his choice he had disguised as knights, lords, Floras or in clothes which point neither to class nor to period and are nothing but picturesque drapery of unusual colour and line, for the models had to be themselves and at the same time beings from another, fairer, world. With them he escapes from one reality, to immerse himself during his flight in another reality. He had done this already in his time at Leiden. In an oil painting he once put on his father, the floury miller Harmen Gerritszoon, a plumed hat, a glittering iron gorget, a costly chain and pendant and jewelled ear-rings.¹ He had portrayed his mother realistically innumerable times, but sometimes even the dressing up of Neeltjen Willemsd. van Zuytbroeck had given him pleasure. The portrait of her, that was already in 1641 in the possession of Charles I, was said to be that

¹ Art Institute, Chicago.

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of the Countess of Desmond. Another time she was the prophetess Hannah and so on.

In these years Saskia was reality for him and Saskia in all manner of re-creations filled his imaginations.

Constantine Huygens, whom nothing ever escaped, must have followed Rembrandt's rising fame with interest and approval. In 1636 there was a fairly lengthy correspondence between them about a series of Passion pictures which he wanted Rembrandt to do for the Stadhouder Frederik Hendrik. This Prince was zealously doing his best to decorate the walls of his houses—Honselaarsdijk, Ter Nieuburch and the Oude Hof, none of them indeed palaces—imaginatively. The Passion pictures were to be a series of six, not more than thirty-six inches by twenty-eight, provisionally intended for the gallery of the Oude Hof.

Rembrandt was grateful to Huygens for acting as intermediary and presented him with a work, *The Imprisonment of Samson*.¹ On January 27, 1639, he wrote to Huygens:

Sir,

I have read your letter of 14th with special pleasure and find there your good favour and inclination, so that I feel both glad and obliged to do you service and friendship as recompense.

etcetera.

Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt.

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This in haste.

Sir, hang this work in a strong light and so that it can be stood away from, then it will be seen at the best advantage.

The address on a letter of February 17 read:

My Lord of Suylykum.

Councillor and Secretary

to his Highness

at the

Hague

In an earlier letter by Rembrandt, dated January 12, 1639, he reports that *The Resurrection* is ready, owing to 'studious industry'. The vast commission evidently oppressed his independent spirit. The *Burial* and the *Resurrection* in particular caused him great trouble. He wrote: 'These are the two that the greatest and most natural mobility is observed in, which is also the chief reason why they have taken so long.'

Rembrandt toiled for five years at this order. In *The Elevation of the Cross* he painted himself, easily recognisable with a beret on, helping to set up the cross. One wonders what the painter meant by 'the most natural mobility'. Perhaps the dynamics of gesture, characteristic of the baroque. These *Passion* pictures are closely related to the baroque style. Or Rembrandt may be referring here to feeling, to emotion. Historians of art have in the course of years been divided into two camps, of which one does not doubt that Rembrandt meant natural gesture. In the

other they do not hesitate to conclude that inner emotion is what Rembrandt meant. I cannot think that inner emotion is meant here, for Rembrandt would not have given that as an excuse for the price he charged or the time the work took him. It is much more likely that he was pointing out that these particular subjects, with their unusual attitudes, had demanded long study and practice of the movements, before he could represent them naturally. The paintings are all in evening light or in a semi-darkness that could be either morning or evening dusk. It enabled Rembrandt to place the principal figures in their own ray or pool of light of hidden origin. This light has a beautiful and noble power in 'The Elevation of the Cross in particular.¹ The Crucified and the cross are, as it were, the luminous forces in a dark tangle of people.

In his relations with colleagues Rembrandt had a high standard of professional ethics. When someone applied to be his pupil he rejected him, if he heard that he was a pupil of Roghman's: that would not do in his studio, for Roghman and he were good friends and he did not wish to give the appearance of enticing pupils.

The collection took time, but even more money. In a legal document he was once described as a merchant of Amsterdam. But he remained the amateur collector, who preferred buying to selling, did not look for profit or count loss. His stock of jewels enabled him to deck Saskia with strings of pearls round her neck and wrists, with clasps, bright with gems, in her auburn hair. He was fond of

¹ Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

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finery but did not care for ostentation. He readily helped those who were in trouble, probably also his fellow-artist, Hercules Seghers.

Was he bemused by his growing reputation? It is not likely, with such a reflective nature, such a thoughtful mind. More probably he was impelled forward day and night by his talent, a mighty driving force, dominating everything and forming the living substance of his existence. He even had an unconcealed contempt for career and success. He treated patrons more as inferiors than as equals or superiors. When his name had already penetrated to England, France and Italy he did not use these connections. As Joachim von Sandrart, knight of San Marco and a haughty man, once put it, after all he felt more at ease with those who were not of the élite: '... only kept company with lowly people'. This must have been a strong characteristic with him, for Joachim von Sandrart was not the only one who thought it worth while to write about it. Roger de Piles, who knew Rembrandt's work from his own observâtion, complained that he went about too much with unimportant people, and said that those who had Rembrandt's reputation at heart had spoken to him about it. Rembrandt retorted that when he wanted relaxation he looked for freedom and not honour. The same writer noted that when someone told the painter that he had a curious technique, he replied to the wise-acre '... qu'il étoit Peintre, et non pas Teinturier'.¹

He could be pleased with his rising fame, but it was not

¹ Roger de Piles, *op. cit.*

in his nature to profit by it. In the proud castle at Muiden, 'this Parnassus of gaiety',¹ where the intellectual élite of Amsterdam conversed and laughed under Hooft's aegis, Rembrandt never crossed the drawbridge. The Knight of St. Michael, Sheriff of Muiden, Bailiff of Gooiland, Chief Officer of Weesp and Weesperkarspel did not count Rembrandt van Rijn among his table companions. The seventeen governors of the East India Company probably did not know him otherwise than by name. The patricians, with a few exceptions, such as Andreas de Graeff, overlooked him. Rembrandt for his part would not extend a finger towards them.

Saskia was continually ill; her sister Antje, of Franeker, was already dead. Rembrandt's drawing of Saskia in bed,² with the dumb, staring look of the incurably ill, is most touching. Beside the bed a woman is sitting as someone sits beside the bed of one who will not recover, silent and watchful. Saskia gave Rembrandt four children, of whom three died at an early age. When the mother herself died on a June day in 1642 the father was left with her only remaining child, Titus, not more than nine months old. She was buried in the Old Church, where her children had been baptised. Rembrandt bought a tomb in the Old Church, below the small organ. Twenty years later he was to sell it, when he was in difficulties with money.

Those who have gone more deeply into Rembrandt's portraits of Saskia—I am thinking here of the oil painting

¹ Geerart Brandt, 't Leven van Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft. 1677

² Print Room. Munich.

of 1632¹—discover that this woman fascinated him to the depths of his being. Regarding and pondering over this picture one realises that he wanted to make much of her. The painter took possession of her with all his senses, all his mind. Nevertheless the refinement of the interpretation is such that this possession has become a contact with the world of the immaterial. The painted image of Saskia is at the same time experience and idea.

In the year of Saskia's death Rembrandt was literally overwhelmed with work, both independent and commissioned. And what of this very varied work drove and impelled him onwards most? There are many biblical subjects from this period, such as *The Reconciliation of David and Absalom*, now in Leningrad. He again pondered on Christ's raising of Lazarus, he etched a *Descent from the Cross*, with the crown of thorns on the right on a dish. Among his work there is a tender etching, *Saskia ill*; the melancholy etching of *St. Jerome indoors*, a subject that he often treated. In it the great churchman, who carried on *St. Paul's work*, is sitting in a dark room where the spiral staircase turning on its newel gives the effect of frozen movement. But 1642 was the year in which Rembrandt finished the *Sortie of the Civic Guard*, generally known as *The Night Watch*. It was a commission. Rembrandt had to portray the eighteen men of Captain Banning Cocq's troop. The painter did not conceive then as individual portrait studies, but placed them in a powerful group-picture, in which the dynamics of movement must have

¹ Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris.

fascinated him. There is talking going on in it, protesting, drumming, discussion, walking about, running, pacing and standing. A musketeer is shouldering his weapon, another is pouring gunpowder down the barrel of his musket, while yet another is blowing the pan of his gun clean. There is a street lad with a horn of powder, two little girls, a barking dog. The figures Rembrandt lavishly scattered among his patrons cannot be counted. Each had to pay a hundred guilders, and some had difficulty in finding themselves among the crowd.

The painter's pupil, Samuel van Hoogstraten, expressed it well: 'Rembrandt has done this painting at the Butts in Amsterdam very well, but in the opinion of many he has observed too much, making more of the great picture of his choice than of the particular portraits that had been commissioned.' He rightly calls the work dashing in its style, but ends regretfully with the general complaint of Rembrandt's contemporaries about the work—'although I should have wished that he had put more light into it'.¹

Seldom has a painting been so admired, so carefully analysed, not understood, or worse still, so fully misunderstood, in the painter's lifetime and after his death; in the course of years and in the passing of centuries.

Rembrandt must have understood, from the trouble into which this work got him, that he would always be a lonely man; his talent would be recognised by a few connoisseurs

¹ Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de Hooge School der Schilderkonst*. p. 176.

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at home and abroad, but not by the multitude. The masses would pass him by, as he passed them by.

Rembrandt's chiaroscuro, becoming more and more a tinged and richly chequered darkness with an underglow of green, from bronze to gold, with a scanty light emanating from it, did not meet with general approval. Painters, too, often condemned it. His pupil Nicolaes Maes once remarked lightly that the younger generation of women did not seem to care for it: '... in particular young ladies took more pleasure in white than in brown.'¹

After the completion of the *Night Watch*, shortly followed by the death of Saskia, Rembrandt must have been out and about a good deal. Like so many people before and after him, who cannot cope with life and its burdens and feel themselves breaking down, he went in search of nature, always the same and always impersonal; just nature, as she always is and always will be. The drawings, scribbles and etchings which he made are innumerable; a bend of a river, often the Amstel, in its beautiful course towards Ouderkerk. Then again there are locks and gateways; little farms; a hut with its litter of planks and sheds round it; quiet banks with waving rushes; a moored boat; frequently a mill looming up in full glory from the flat horizon. A year after Saskia's death the etching of *The Three Trees* was made. I can see in it a forerunner—though Rembrandt was probably not aware of it—of the etching *The Three Crosses*, of about

¹ Houbraken, *De groote Schouburgh der nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*.

ten years later, 1653. May Rembrandt not have reflected that tree and cross both grow in our earthly lives?

While Rembrandt's fame was expanding it seemed as if he was gradually losing the public interest. In 1641 the painting was made, attributed to Van Dyck, of the young couple William II and Mary Stuart, one fifteen, the other ten years old. When Henrietta Maria of England came to The Hague to present her child-victim to the Stadhouder, it is doubtful if she had seen Rembrandt's work. When the thorny negotiations started in the great plea for peace between the Netherlands and Spain, it was Terborch, that worthy man, who portrayed the negotiators. He did not put people but puppets on the canvas: the States on the left, the Spaniards on the right. One wonders what Rembrandt's conception of the negotiators would have been. He was filled with the idea of peace, though. In 1641 he created the allegory, *Unity of the Country*.¹ He does not portray well-known people; he wanted to illustrate an idea on the canvas, an almost unthinkable idea after a period of misunderstanding, cruelty and persecution. His generation had not experienced the bloody edicts, burnings at the stake, the starved towns; but it had heard of them and listened to the stories. It is a painting with much rhetoric which no one yet has been able to interpret fully. An allegory? A lion with fiery eyes on a chain, armoured horseman, snorting horses, the walls of a fortress. Furthermore the work is not finished. Perhaps the form of the allegory fettered his thoughts and imagination too

¹ Boymans Museum, Rotterdam

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much. He needed freedom for his creations. Allegory was a subject in which he did not excel. But the painting gives a valuable insight into Rembrandt's feelings. For him, as for William the Silent, peace was a mighty play of unity, a precarious balance between unequal forces and values.

His little household, the motherless Titus and the housing of his enormous collection were entrusted to quite an ordinary working woman, Geertje Dircx, the widow of a trumpeter. The relations between master and servant were unhappy. Rembrandt looked for the comfort and support at home to which he was used; generous as usual, he gave her some presents; quarrels occurred and she went to live in a room elsewhere, spreading slander about him. She demanded support and Rembrandt was summoned before the Chamber of Matrimonial Causes, but did not appear. Geertje stated that she had been promised marriage by her master and also been given a ring, described as a rose ring, probably one with a diamond. Rembrandt denied the first allegation and did not say anything about the second.

Another household help was discovered, a sergeant's daughter from Bredevoort, the clever Hendrickje Stoffels. She took his part and appeared before the Chamber for him. Nevertheless the painter was ordered to pay Geertje 200 guilders a year. This was the wearisome end of much quarrelling and hard words. Geertje later entered an institution, where she was evidently paid for. Perhaps it was an asylum. Her family let Rembrandt go on paying, however. When he discovered it he was furious and had Geertje's brother, Pieter Dirksz., arrested for debt. He

tried to get rid of Geertje absolutely, but in vain. But there are not often absolutes in the relative lives of earthly muddlers. Geertje sat as model on some occasions. Valentin thinks that she appears three times in oils and six times in drawings.

The other woman in Rembrandt's life, Hendrickje Stoffels from Bredevoort, was now his companion, which she was to remain to the bitter end. She was never to move from his side. She looked after Titus and her master and the house. Rembrandt did not marry her, although she was his woman. He would have lost the usufruct of Saskia's inheritance by remarriage, which he could not afford, as his creditors were pressing him hard. The house in Breestraat was still not paid off. Hendrickje worked and toiled, cared for his possessions and kept them in order. She called herself 'Housewife of Sr. Rembrandt van Reyn, artist'. If she had to sign she mostly set her mark. On very rare occasions, shakily and with difficulty, she copied the letters of her name. The Reformed Church Council was not pleased at this cohabitation. It summoned her three times to have her child baptised. The fourth time she appeared. She was seriously urged to repent and excluded from taking part in the Lord's Supper.

She had her daughter baptised in the same year, after which the Church Council left her in peace: Rembrandt was included only the first time in the summons: presumably he was not a member of the congregation.

He was up to his neck in difficulties. There were still demands relating to Saskia and his brothers-in-law

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had to represent him. It was said that he was spending Saskia's inheritance, which was to go to Titus. When the war with England broke out in 1652 there was a shortage of money, people got poorer, creditors importunate. The harassed painter, at his wit's end, tried to obtain loans, of course from Jan Six too.

But he was still not at all conciliatory towards his patrons; he continued to treat them capriciously and obstinately. Houbraken relates that when a monkey died in Rembrandt's house, he included it, unasked, in a commissioned painting. The patrons were not at all pleased at being portrayed with this animal. Rembrandt said that if they objected to the monkey they need not pay, but he had no intention of painting it out. A certain Diego Andrada complained of the portrait of his daughter: 'that it did not resemble her by a long way',¹ but Rembrandt refused to alter it before being paid. Likeness was a matter for the painter, a debatable axiom in the case of a commissioned portrait. If the father said it was not a good likeness the painter would only alter it if the St. Luke's Guild said that it was not like her. He had trouble with patrons time and again, but his character did not change. He was crotchety, haughty, self-willed, though at the same time mild, liberal and compliant towards those who understood him.

In 1656 the dreaded catastrophe occurred: in the summer of that year his bankruptcy began. It seemed that the executors of the law had pity on the great, hard-working artist. The findings of the Chamber of Insolvent Estates

¹ Houbraken.

were not given till November of the following year. His possessions were to be sold by order of the Court. Between July 1656 and November 1657 he attempted the almost impossible—to keep his possessions, which were his existence, together. He had the house entered in the maternal inheritance of his son, Titus. Nevertheless it was sold at a loss and Titus could only be a preferential creditor. The collection which Rembrandt had made with a collector's passion was sold piece by piece below its value. Before, during and after the bankruptcy, as was to be expected, poignant discussions were held about conditions for which no solution was to be found. The oppressions, humiliations and misunderstandings were innumerable. Rembrandt had not the knack of using his connections, let alone of exploiting them. He had never been able to, and certainly could not in the time of desperate trouble. Isaac van Hertsbeeck, Jan Pietersz. Bronckhorst and Nicolaes van Cruysbergen, painted by him in the *Night Watch*, were among those who had a say in the bankruptcy proceedings.

There was no powerful clientele, no school of followers, behind this renowned painter. In the hour of misfortune he was alone, as he now realised. He had never climbed the rungs of the ladder to fortune, he had never cultivated connections. In the years that had passed he had become master only of his creative urge, of his long working days. His work was always an inner matter—the outside world stood indeed outside it. It is no wonder that he appeared to sell fewer and fewer paintings. It is known that in 1656 he had seventy-two canvases piled up in his house.

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During the sale he occupied a room at the Keyzerskroon Hotel. There lived the impoverished painter in the bitterest contrition, his soul going through the purgatory of humiliation. In other rooms his possessions were exhibited to the inquisitive Amsterdam public. The dearest and most precious pieces from his collection were plucked out by the roots like plants to be offered for sale, so that Rembrandt would perhaps no longer have recognised them. Plaster casts were sold, seventeen arms and legs taken from life, which could certainly still have been of great use to the painter in figure composition. Everything was heaped up and pushed together, shoes and chairs, pictures and saucepans, weapons and drawings, household goods and rare pieces together, sketches and engravings, panels and canvases, paintings by Dutch, Italian and German masters. A document states that they were 'assembled together in a most curious way'.

Among those that came under the hammer were the Unity of the Country; works by Adrian Brouwer, Jan Lievens; small and large paintings by Hercules Seghers; portfolios bulging with his own works; drawings of nude models, 'consisting of men and women; being naked'; 'a book full of landscapes, drawn from life'; there was another parchment sketchbook of landscapes; sketches and drawings by Lucas van Leyden, Breughel the elder, Lucas Cranach; works by Raphael; a little drawing of Titus at three years old; 'three little dogs from life'; a death mask of Prince Maurits; antique chairs, Chinese basketwork, flutes, hats, calabashes, exotic plants, fine cloths, lions'

skins, shirts, an old chest, thirty-three guns, handkerchiefs, napkins, table-cloths, a tin chamber pot, some books, but not many. Rembrandt meditated more than he read and he was a regular reader of the Bible, the book that continually enthralled him. But the estate contained a Montaigne, a tragedy by Jan Six, Albrecht Dürer's proportion books, a Flavius Josephus and, of course, an old Bible.

The impoverished man was allowed his painting equipment; pallet, brushes; also a few chairs; a lay figure used as a model for flying angels; a few bottles of turpentine, varnish and some oil.

The people who shuffled past this display must have thought the collection curious, but they may have considered the painter-collector even more singular than his possessions.

The creditors could not, however, be paid in full by the proceeds, so that he was not discharged from bankruptcy. The question arose whether every painting done thenceforth by Rembrandt was to pass into their hands. Hendrickje and Titus remained unshaken in their loyalty to their man and father. They fought for him and for themselves. In 1660, when Titus was nineteen, they found a solution. They set up in business together as art dealers. Whatever Rembrandt produced, possessed or brought into the house was part of their business, and that was an end of it. It was laid down in a document that Rembrandt had no part or lot in the picture shop; nothing concerned him, neither the business nor the household goods. The agreement, which is a disguised guardianship, says protectively

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and respectfully that he might help and assist; ' . . . no one could be more capable than the aforesaid Rembrandt van Rhijn'. He was to do this for his board and lodging; 'to have food and drink and be free of household expenses and rent'. In this way he was looked after and defended by the two people who loved him in spite of everything: Hendrickje, his life-partner, and Titus, his son.

Rembrandt's creative work was growing tremendously in these years of care and sorrow. He accomplished some of his greatest work between 1642 and 1661. He drew, etched and painted from life or from the depths of his imagination. The many depictions of Christ take on a visionary character; he reflects on hate and love, turns over in his mind injustice and compassion; he discovers them in the faces of others and in his self-portraits.

Rembrandt's career shows the truth of what I once read on an old panel in a church, 'Work is God's help'. The more original the work, the nearer it is to the hidden springs from which everything flows that truly lives. The man worked more, worked harder, than can be told. He toiled unwearyingly and strove to hear the voice of inspiration and to give it shape. He rejected impressions and influences of the world about him if he so much as suspected that they might come between him and his inner thrill and emotion. But ultimately it was at these springs that he could refresh himself and draw the undiminished strength which centuries later we must still admire. The self-portraits of the last decades of his life show that he had

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been afflicted to the depths of his soul, but not once, not ever defeated.

One can, however, at times scarcely help asking the question why this man, recognised by connoisseurs not only in Amsterdam, but also in France, England and Italy, so frequently had an atmosphere of isolation round him after a commission; why, if a commission means appreciation, its fulfilment created trouble and misunderstanding. After Dr. Tulp's Anatomy Lesson, an undisputed success—to use a word not very suitable for Rembrandt—the painter still did not keep the universal appreciation he had gained. He was not directly or openly attacked, but at the moment that his external prestige should have been reinforced it was as if his contacts, not his fame, decreased. His former pupil, Gerard Dou, working partly in Rembrandt's style, less gifted but still of considerable talent, was a much greater social success. Foreign buyers, particularly those of Christina of Sweden, thronged his studio. Perhaps with Rembrandt it was his surly, gruff behaviour, his unpolished manners. He may have shrugged his shoulders too often, for success weighed little with him.

As a student at Leiden, the young Christiaan Huygens, as gifted as his great father though in a rather different sphere, was copying Rembrandt's work. Rembrandt had a name among people of taste and knowledge at home and abroad. Nonetheless his social position was dubious.

In 1640 Charles I possessed work by Rembrandt and by Lievens. The latter travelled to England. Rembrandt

stayed at home. In the King's descriptive catalogue¹ the works are described as 'Done by Rembrandt and given to the Kingh by my Lord Ankrom'. The painter must have heard of this. He took no action. 'A virtuous mind. Respect honour before possessions', he wrote in his early years in the motto album of Burkhard Grossman of Weimar, who was travelling in the Republic.

His second Anatomy Lesson, that of Dr. Joan Deyman,² Dr. Tulp's successor, gives a trenchant picture of the autopsy, the burrowing in the human body. It seems as if again one thought dominates his mind: whether death was the end or a transference of forces. It is remarkable that the face of the body is so inspired—more so than in Dr. Tulp's Anatomy Lesson—so that the viewer wonders whether death is here temporary or final.

The work had only a cool reception in Amsterdam. The Anatomy Lesson of the years before, that of Tulp, was considered better by the opinionated public. The Night Watch alienated them too, and many patrons. They were not pleased at being mere figures in a crowd of people and being scarcely recognisable. When the architectural wonder of the young town, Amsterdam Town Hall, was finished, Govert Flinck, an ex-pupil of Rembrandt's got the big commission. He died and the municipal authorities commissioned Jordaens to fill the two wall surfaces, while Lievens and Rembrandt were each given only a lunette. Rembrandt's work was to be placed above the door in

¹ Manuscript in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

² Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

the great gallery. He sketched carefully—the drawing is still at Munich—and planned how to adapt it to the architectural surroundings. The subject is a bold one: Claudius Civilis taking the oath from the Batavians. The painting grew into a work raised above all style and period. It is neither Renaissance nor Baroque, but Rembrandt *tout pur*. Perhaps the oath-taking by these semi-barbarians was too grim, too heathen for the City Fathers of 17th century Amsterdam. They may have seen a glorification of rebellion in it, rather than an illustration of respect for constituted authority. The penetrating glow of colour, the magic light shining up against the faces of the confederates, may have seemed to them unsettling. In any case the work went back to Rembrandt's studio and did not return to the Amsterdam Town Hall: a humiliation for the gifted painter. When the town received distinguished visitors it was not Rembrandt, but a mediocre painter, Jurriaan Ovens, who was commissioned to produce something at top speed. In a few days he painted over Govert Flinck's design to make a serviceable painting. The great painting of Claudius Civilis, covering more than twenty-six square metres, was difficult to handle. The work was considerably reduced in size. Presumably Rembrandt himself in bitterness used the knife on it. It left the country for good.¹

The same thing happened again: Rembrandt's powerful work put a barrier between him and his patrons.

His unpopularity may have been connected with the

¹ Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

way in which he represented people. Only a select few at home and abroad appreciated him highly while the general public ignored him. 'One and the same reason was at the root of the rejection of Shakespeare, Rembrandt and Dante: aversion from extravagance, dread of what touches too nearly.'¹

In the same year Rembrandt painted *The Syndics*, five cloth assayers round a table with a servant behind them, a marvel of peace and tranquility.²

Now another blow shook his family, his retreat from the tumult of the world. In 1661 Hendrickje the courageous felt so exhausted that in spite of being only thirty-six she made her will. It contained touching words: she was 'sick of body, though still walking and standing'.

It is easy to see from the wording of the will that she wanted to help and protect her lord and master, her beloved Rembrandt, both then and after her death. In all their troubles she held him in love and loyalty as the apple of her eye. Should her own daughter die childless, Titus, Saskia's son, was to be her heir. The testatrix gave the impoverished Rembrandt the trust and honour of being guardian to her daughter Cornelia.

Hendrickje's premonitions had not deceived her, for she was soon to die. One satisfaction was granted her. In a document she was officially described as 'housewife of Sr. Rembrandt van Reyn'. It was on July 24, 1663, only twenty-one years after the death of Saskia, that Rembrandt

¹ Huizinga, *Collected Works* Part 4, p. 141, 1949, Tjeenk Willink, Haarlem.

² Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

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closed the eyes of his second wife. She was buried in the Westerkerk. The mourning widower was fifty-seven.

Hendrickje's active share in Rembrandt's life reminds one of Homer's words: even slaves have been born from holy streams.¹

Titus ran the art dealer's business by himself. The smaller the property, the more important trifles became. But the young man was the son of Saskia, who died early; he became ill and was found like her to be consumptive. He seemed to be fading away, though he would not admit it and worked and married. He too wrote a will when still young in which he calls Cornelia, his father's and Hendrickje's daughter, 'my half-sister'. There can seldom have been so many wills written in a poor family as by the impoverished Van Rijns.

In 1668, less than a year after his marriage, Titus died at the early age of twenty-seven, the only surviving child of Saskia van Rijn, née Van Uylenburg. He was the son who all his life had been his father's dearest reality, the child that he many times re-created in the play of fantasy and vision.

An old document speaks of a bier with a pall-canopy and sixteen bearers. He was buried in the beautiful Westerkerk.

It had become oppressively silent in the little house on the Rozengracht. Food was scarce. To keep the shabby household going Rembrandt had to dip into his savings and those of Cornelia. He had to borrow to provide food

for the table. Later, when Titus' wife, Magdalena van Loo, heard of this she was most indignant and said that half of Cornelia's 'golden nest-egg' belonged to her.

Very occasionally there was good fortune. In 1668 Rembrandt packed and shipped off another 180 etchings to Don Antonio Ruffo, his admirer in Sicily, who had been buying from him since 1652. He had painted him an Aristotle, an Alexander the Great and a Homer.

Political life went on in these years with alternations of prosperity and reverses. It could not, indeed, stand still, but remained in constant movement like the ebb and flow of the tide. One wonders how much of it penetrated to the lonely dweller on the Rozengracht, how much he thought about it. Naval engagements followed one another, Dunkirk, Chatham; Tromp and De Ruyter were the great names in everyone's mouth. Sir William Temple was conducting his far-sighted statesmanship and finding a balance in the Triple Alliance. An Orange, wonderful to relate, was Child of the State. Time the almighty would reclaim its rights, however; when the Prince was of age he was to take his seat in the States as deputy for Zeeland. Johan de Witt had passed the zenith of his popularity. Even a statesman of genius needs popular recognition if he is to maintain a lasting position.

Cosimo de Medici visited the Netherlands in 1667 and 1668 and Pieter Blaeu conducted him. The distinguished visitor also met '*Reinbrent, pittore famoso*'.¹

¹ Dr. G. J. Hoogewerff, The two journeys of Cosimo de Medici, Prince of Tuscany.

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Rembrandt went on working. Vision after vision was made real. In the year of Titus' death he painted *The Jewish Bride*,¹ a picture that speaks of protection and trust. He also created *The Family*,² called by us, posterity, *The Brunswick Family*, perhaps his greatest work of genius. This group, parents and three children, was not painted as a commission but as a work of imagination: not as by a spectator but as by a participant. They are his own people. There must have been joy in his heart, drawn from memories and experiences in the innermost of his mind. Once more he tells us explicitly what has been nearest and dearest to him: a happy family. Perhaps a bourgeois ideal, but then in all the nobility implicit in this ideal.

No one on the canvas is dressed up as Rembrandt liked to dress up his models in his youth. The dress of parents and children transcends time, especially in its colours. While painting the artist must have forgotten Saskia's sighing, Hendrickje's warnings, Titus' coughing. Once more he called blessed what he had loved, two women here merged into one figure. The features of both speak on the face of this woman. The three girls could perhaps be Saskia's three children that died in infancy and the father in the picture his son Titus, had he been healthy and lived. Many portraits of Titus live in this man's features. Everything seems to have become essence in this painting. I suppose that the painter's imagination ranged

¹ Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

² Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, Brunswick.

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over the boundaries of the past and future into a realm encompassing both heaven and earth. Memories are surely wishful thinking too, and here they are flying high. The painting was not commissioned and his thoughts had a free run: only the medium tied the painter to composition and limitation. No element dominates, everything seems to balance together, each one is himself, together they form the family. The father in the background, with a shadow of care on his face but an expression of gladness at the corners of his mouth, looks at the spectator. The mother gazes mild-eyed at her youngest. The children's expressions differ greatly. The youngest on its mother's lap is merry; its hat has slipped and its hand with outspread fingers is laid confidently on its mother's bare bosom. The second youngster is very cheerful, with twinkling eyes and chubby cheeks. The eldest, carrying a basket of flowers, is deep in serious thought.

How many colours grow and bloom in this painting! Modern X-ray technique has shown that Rembrandt worked here in a masterly way with lower and upper layers to add light and shade to the upper colour substance, to attain the unattainable, the illusion of darkness and light. The azure colours let tints shine through, partly or entirely. The brushwork is sometimes broad strokes, vehemently applied, then again hair-fine, scarcely visible lines. It is a wonderful play of bright and dull, placed side by side and within each other in the composition with a complete knowledge of contrasting and complementary colours. There are emerald green tints, quartz colouring,

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glitter as of precious and semi-precious stones, olive brilliance, creamy whites, brown brightening to gold and lemon yellow like sunshine.

Nevertheless Rembrandt must have done much thinking and searching to obtain just the right arrangement for this picture. The X-ray photographs, penetrating to the lowest layer, show that the father at first had a high forehead; the painter broadened his head. He raised the mother's eyelids so that her glance could rest on the child on her lap. The eldest daughter originally had a rather flat nose like her sisters; later he sharpened the line of the nose to give her own characteristics. He worked continually on the clothing, making a white collar narrower, the hem of a frock a littler higher or a trifle lower

He made one more self-portrait in 1669.¹ Once more he confronted himself with his deep personality, setting his foot deep in the uncomprehended. The rest is his own. It could have only been accomplished in loneliness. The wavy, grey hair is abundant and a painter's cap is set like a crown on his head. His gaze is darkened by dusky shadows. The time for seeing and discovering, looking and observing, seems to be running out.

Except for this self-portrait we have nothing more from him in the winter, spring and summer of 1669. The deserted man may well have sat contemplating by himself, as once his old mother gazed with meditative eyes on twilight distances, seen by herself alone.

¹ Mauritshuis, The Hague

Rembrandt

In the autumn of 1669, on October 4, Death came for him too, Rembrandt van Rijn, draughtsman, engraver and painter, the miller's son from Leiden. A lone man, with no one truly to mourn or weep for him. He too was buried in the Westerkerk at Amsterdam, whose tower he had once sketched with rapid hand¹ and in which his son Titus had also been laid to rest. The spot where the father's bones lie cannot be traced. There is no doubt that it was a pauper's funeral, and that there was no money for a tombstone. The register of deaths in the Westerkerk states:

1669 Deaths in the month of October:

8th Rembrant van Rijn of the Rozengracht

In the deserted studio an unfinished canvas stood on the easel: a child in an old man's arms: Simeon in the Temple.

¹ Museum Fodor, Amsterdam.

II. ANIMALS

THE ASSYRIAN LIONESS, pierced by three inflexible arrows, so deeply wounded that she drags her paralysed hindlegs after her, so tormented with pain that her mouth is opened wide in a roar; between this relief in the British Museum and Rembrandt's drawing there, entitled simply *Lioness with Prey*, there is a difference of 2000 years or more; a space of time sufficient to show that emotion, after all the starting point of all artistic imagination, is not static, but moves and changes. Rembrandt and his contemporaries were not people who felt nothing but fear of wild animals. For them the animal, wild or tame, was primarily a delightful, harmless creature, an enthralling play of line. The early Renaissance had already given expression to this feeling. The almost tender drawings of deer and dogs by Vittore Pisano, Lorenzo Ghiberti's bronze squirrels, Albrecht Dürer's spirited animals, had shown that an animal, when not pursued, is a delight to the eye.

Religious people were showing in art and letters that animals too were part of God's creation. Rembrandt, with his unequalled knowledge of the Bible, must have read and re-read with care the Book of Job, and chapter thirty-nine where the writer enumerates and appraises animals from the grasshopper to the horse. Francis of Assisi went still farther than the Old Testament writer, seeing in animals his equals, his brethren.

Probably about 1637 and 1638 there was a menagerie of wild animals in Amsterdam, for the series of rapidly

Rembrandt

drawn sketches of lions and elephants by Rembrandt dates from this time. He sketched the lion asleep, lying to the right or the left, differently from his contemporary Rubens, who in his drawings showed lions and lionesses in action, with the swelling rhythm of tendons and muscles. Rembrandt liked to show not only people but even wild animals meditating and musing: the elephants trudging along or standing, sometimes three together, with firm outlines of black crayon so subtly placed as to suggest to the beholder the hard dry skin, the enormous shapes and ponderous bodies from the parts of the paper left white. This big animal's little eye, which we humans call melancholy without knowing whether the glance has anything to do with sadness, the expressive mobility of the trunk must have fascinated him. The rapid lines representing eye and trunk are always the most nervous part of the sketches from life.

In the catalogue of the sale of Rembrandt's goods there was a portfolio, called by him 'Animals from life'. The study of birds of paradise with the delightful drooping tail-feathers¹ no doubt comes under this heading.

Apart from lions and elephants, used by chance as models, Rembrandt shows two main groups of animals: domestic animals; dogs and cats: and livestock; cows, an occasional horse, pigs and sheep. In the second group the dead, or rather the slaughtered animal must be included.

In the self-portrait of 1631² where he has dressed himself

¹ Musée Bonnat, Bayonne.

² Petit Palais, Paris.

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up a grand gentleman, there is a trimmed, blond poodle sitting somewhat too obediently and with an arched back at his master's feet. I prefer the numberless cheerful dogs running, barking and jumping up in Rembrandt's great works. Indeed it is not only in the Night Watch that an excited dog yaps at the drummer. The blind Tobias is accompanied by a lively dog. In the sketch of Abraham banishing Hagar a faithful dog is going down the steps and evidently has no intention of leaving her. In a drawing of the same year¹ Hagar is also followed by a dog, shown in heavy lines and with great emphasis. When David offers Goliath's head to Saul, a dog is barking at him. When Rembrandt wants to show the Holy Family in the intimacy of the home, the cat playing, or warming itself at the fire, is not lacking. Cats and dogs belonged in his time to the life of the community and Rembrandt must have enjoyed their company. He surely noticed how animals lead their own lives among human beings. In the Hundred Guilder Print, where Christ is the healer and all the thirty-three bystanders are filled with him, each according to his own character, there is one dog lying, taking no notice of anything or anybody and, turning away from Christ, is looking at something else. In the etching of Emmaus, 1634, Rembrandt gives a dog the same function. The dog is going its own way impassively and looking with interest at something to which those present are paying no attention.

As the angel is leaving the house of Tobias, in an etching

¹ Museum van Oudheden, Groningen.

of 1641, there is also a lively little dog, over which the mighty glow of light from heaven is just passing.

Rembrandt seldom produced horses with much vigour or knowledge of them, although he copied an equestrian figure from a medallion by Pisanello in the later states of the etching of the Three Crosses. The horse was considered at the time, especially in painting and sculpture, as an expression of pomp and power. One has only to think of Donatello's, Andrea del Verrocchio's and Leonardo da Vinci's horses. Rembrandt was averse in all periods of his life from everything pompous and he has laconically passed over this form of expression. Velasquez' aristocratic horse was not his either. A single horse with a lonely rider wanders now and then through his landscapes, but it is inconspicuous and unconvincing.

The grey ridden by the young Titus in the fine canvas, *The Polish Horseman*, about 1655,¹ is not a great success. It is a skinny nag, reminiscent of Don Quixote's Rosinante, ridden with a slack rein but still having its mouth open. Perhaps though it is the best painting of a horse that Rembrandt made.

Animals are figures of minor importance for the painter in his landscapes. The animal as the chief figure—compare for instance *The Cow*, with its reflection, by Paulus Potter²—did not exist in Rembrandt's conceptions.

Here too he remained faithful to his own qualities. He was dominated and possessed by the idea of the human

¹ Frick Collection, New York.

² Mauritshuis, The Hague.

being. He probed deeply into human life, meditated on it day and night. This burning interest drew his attention to the slaughtered rather than to the dead animal. I am thinking here of the self-portrait with a bittern in his hands, 1639,¹ where the bird's head hangs down and its wings droop; of the girl with the dead peacocks² and dripping blood of a strange colour. Continuing the theme but following it more deeply, he shows death by destruction, the carcase transferred to another sphere of the world's affairs. The Slaughtered Ox of 1655³ and the same subject about 1638⁴ come into this category. The ox, that powerful draught animal, has in the panel been slaughtered and cut up: the trunk is split open, hollowed out—cleaned, as the butchers say—like the human body with the hollowed-out torso under the hands of Dr. Deyman. The carcase of the ox hangs in a dark cellar, the coagulated blood is no longer dripping, the animal has undergone so much treatment that it is hardly an ox any longer.

In the painting of the slaughtered ox at Glasgow, a woman is scrubbing the floor clean of blood and bits of meat. The stripped skin and the horns, which once displayed the beauty and the health of the animal, lie rolled up in a heap on the ground, departed power and glory. The subject of the slaughtered ox engaged him again and again. Perhaps the most striking example is the oak panel

¹ Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.

² Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

³ Louvre, Paris.

⁴ Art Gallery, Glasgow

of 1637¹ in which the gutted carcase gapes ghostly at the beholder. In 1639 Rembrandt tackled the same subject again.² Here too hide and horns are lying on a cellar floor, dripping with blood, for further use. The apparatus of slaughtering, axe, dish, tub, have been put in by the painter too. They are the simple means man needs to put into effect the process of life and death, use and consumption. The inexorable secret of existence, death, rebirth has been given here in the theme of the slaughtered ox in a manner that shrinks from nothing. It is not merely a question of realistic art; the painter's thoughts must have mounted to the metaphysical upper limits of life and death.

There is one animal quite apart in Rembrandt's work, the oil-painting of Balaam's ass³. He illustrates here one of the most miraculous stories of the Old Testament, in which blessing and cursing in their deepest significance continually succeed one another, in which a man is in a state of incomprehension, in the unseen revelation of the divine. The ass, on the other hand, sees and understands. The divine is revealed to her, an Emmaus story before Emmaus. Rembrandt takes just this moment from the story: the ass—in contrast to the people around her—sees the angel of God, understands the angel's language, submits to the hail of blows which the prophet lets loose three times upon her. The animal surpasses the limitations of its kind, because 'the Lord opened the mouth of the ass',

¹ Johnson Collection, Philadelphia.

² Rath Museum, Budapest.

³ Musée Cognacq-Jay, Paris.

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as the Bible says. Remaining an animal, the ass becomes human and speaks human language. Remaining an animal she becomes superhuman, because she alone stands in the divine.

As a painter Rembrandt solves the problem of this story visually. He gives the ass—in profile and with only the right eye visible—the look of an animal and at the same time of a person. It is an ordinary donkey with floppy ears, dilating its nostrils as a donkey does when it brays. It shows only one mark of distinction in its revealed vision: its look is threefold, at once animal, human and super-human.

Rembrandt created this work in the time that he was at Leiden, just twenty years old, in 1626. It is easy to understand that the painter Claude Vignon sent his greetings to him by Ciartres, an art dealer who was travelling in the Netherlands for the French Crown, for he had a great opinion of this work. 'And in Amsterdam give my greetings also to Signor Rembrandt and bring something of his with you. Do tell him that yesterday I saw with high regard his picture of the prophet Balaam.'¹

¹ Seymour Slive.

III. LANDSCAPES

IN THE COURSE of the seventeenth century the landscape in art grew into an independent subject. It was no longer merely background or scenery; the painter or draughtsman felt the immediate bond between himself and what moved him in nature. One quality dominated in their representations, the same quality that made the century great in other spheres: peacefulness. The wandering painter looked deliberately, far from the tumult of street or market, for tranquillity in nature, rest for the eye and quiet for the ear. A sparsely populated countryside was able to give this in plenty, for space was as wide as the sky above. Heath or meadow, the unbroken expanses stretched to the horizon. Perhaps there was a church tower here, or a windmill there, as solitary vertical lines making the country even more deserted and accentuating its features more sharply. A cathedral tower stood on the horizon of a vast meadow landscape contrasting with the low-lying country round about in an enthralling visual dialogue. But today what do we see? A church is not much more than a small vertical line beside a diversity of high-tension pylons, blocks of flats, factories with forests of chimneys, gigantic gasometers and other concrete constructions to which the layman cannot give a name.

Only the sea and sometimes the lake still have a quiet horizon as far as the gaze can reach.

In his years at Leiden and in his early years at Amsterdam, Rembrandt showed little interest in nature. It was

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only an explanatory background to the human figures in the foreground. To take a single example from 1630: the blazing town in the background, behind Jeremiah mourning for Jerusalem.¹ He still had to discover peace in landscapes. There is for instance the highly romantic and rather untidy landscape of improbable trees and trunks, precipices and rocks in the etching of 1634, *The Announcement to the Shepherds*. It was not really till his middle age that Rembrandt's hungry eyes, which had already examined so much, began to see the country, the natural landscape as it lives in the change of the seasons, with feeling. No doubt sorrow at Saskia's death and domestic troubles drove him out of his own home. He went walking and wandering, he began to look around him, thinking and feeling. His emotions were aroused. From that moment the itch to draw came into his hands and he began to draw and paint nature as never before. Up to about 1656 he must have been a great walker, who never went out without his sketchbook, roaming along roads and through fields. In the last ten years of his life it seems as though he turned away from nature again. Perhaps he was physically no longer equal to long walks. The self-portraits from these years show a man with a too thickset, unresilient body. In those last years his studio must have been his chief refuge.

The reproduction of nature forms in his work two quite distinct forms of landscape art: the seen and the imagined landscape: naturalism and imagination.

¹ Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Rembrandt

At the time of his interest in nature he did considerable work in this field; about twenty-four etchings, more than 200 drawings and about seventeen oil paintings—and that as well as an excess of other work.

Particularly in the sketches nature is seen directly and put down on paper in frantic haste: unromantic, as nature is, knowing nothing of the romantic emotions which are only put into it by people. It was a new phase in Rembrandt's growth: he was confronted by two phenomena hitherto unknown to him: space and light all around. This brooding, contemplative man, to whom darkness in all its variegations was the birthplace of rising life, felt himself suddenly standing under a sky which day by day pours down its light upon the good and the bad, a light that darkens at some times and places, but never permanently sets; a light that endures.

It is one of the most exquisite pleasures to take and look at those landscape sketches one by one in the silence and seclusion of a print room. They are not a dialogue and not remotely dialectical; they are simply bits and pieces of observed nature, captured with incredible speed in a few simple, essential lines. Rembrandt the indoor man, the sedentary studio worker, must at last out there in the country have been able to breathe and to relax while he really let his eyes roam over everything. The subject matter of the sketches is entirely commonplace: a tumbledown farm; a bank with an old boat moored to it; a wide landscape with windmill after windmill; the turn of a cow's neck; a bend in the river Amstel; a sandy path.

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Rembrandt provides a hundred different picturesque surprises, captured with the simplest means and no desire ever to add a monumental or heroic element. He could, if he wanted to, be a scrupulously honest observer. The hasty, impetuous lines are sometimes reminiscent of the strokes and angles of hurried handwriting. All the same as a good craftsman he was always seeking other means of satisfactory reproduction. At first he used crayon a lot, then pen, sometimes pen and pencil, on paper and on parchment; sometimes a quill and later again a reed pen, touching up with gentle or vigorous strokes of the pencil; sometimes the pencil alone. The sketch of the road near the Grebbe,¹ full of dash and energy, was made with a reed pen and pencil. But the tender, shy view of Haarlem over the dunes—I think on a damp morning—is a pen drawing, softened with pencil.²

Naturally Rembrandt, with his thirst for knowledge, was influenced by contemporaries, distinguished as landscape painters, such as Hercules Seghers and Adam Elsheimer. He must have studied their interpretations carefully. He made a whole collection of Seghers' work, but in his sketches he remained entirely himself. They are the embryonic growth that precedes the complete expression of form, before composition: the essential is only hinted at. Perhaps this is why their eloquence is so unanswerable. In his wanderings along the Amstel to Diemen or Ouderkerk, through the Gooi, to Rhenen with its many

¹ Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

² Boymans Museum, Rotterdam

gates, all of which Rembrandt drew, or in his rambles along the treeless IJ, through streets and alleys, across the canals of his Amsterdam, these sketches acquired their own originality. As a rule the lines are drawn impetuously, without premeditation. They are not finished, sometimes very unfinished; they are only indications, like a stammered word or cry that cannot become articulate in the stress of violent emotion. The lines have a thousand different characters; vigorous and caressing; carefully drawn and dashed down in all haste; some are mere scratches, others give the impression of softness. Rembrandt must have sketched in a torment of emotion—for indoors or out of doors he was always himself. Sometimes the meaning is only roughly expressed and there numbers of wrong and crooked lines and strokes; the sketches are criss-crossed with corrections, but what they always are is intense. The totality of the impression is so strong that the eloquence outweighs the unruliness of the imperfections and is often really moving.

Nature-lovers such as Ruskin remark on lack of accuracy, especially in the etchings. The inaccuracy cannot be disputed. As soon as an emotion became lasting, Rembrandt's inner spiritual life flooded him. He no longer saw nature around him for her own sake, but only as a symbol. In the splendid etching, *Landscape with Three Trees*, of about 1643, it is not possible to tell to what species the three similar trees belong: they may be three beeches, defying the storm so regally. The shape of their tops suggests oaks; the dead twigs sticking out of the top of

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the tree on the left are characteristic of beeches; the trunks are reminiscent of oaks, but the carefully drawn horizontal etch-lines point more to the character of beech trunks.

In the little etching of about 1638 or 1639, *The Flight into Egypt*, I cannot see what animal Mary is riding on. It is an intermediate creature, cow-donkey, not quite one nor yet entirely the other. It seems natural to anyone who knows Rembrandt, and knows him in such a way that he can raise knowledge to understanding, that the painter's attention--unless people were concerned--sometimes wandered, that he did not distinguish different kinds of trees, any more than he painted flowers or fruit for their own sake. His mind was always grappling with basic problems in the life of mankind. He could only approach them visually. His mind therefore did not create a beech, or an oak, but a tree; often not a donkey, or a cow, but an animal. It was not analysis but synthesis that held and fascinated his mind. He is close to the concrete world only in his sketches from nature. His landscapes are Rembrandt-*esque* in that they do not go into detail but rapidly capture an essence only. He could reproduce a material thing in the finest detail if the poverty of the subject compelled him, if the sitter for a commissioned portrait bored him so excruciatingly that he fixed his attention on the stitches of the lace collar, the snow-white cuff, the links of a gold necklace or a pearl ear-ring, and made them the object of the exercise. He painted them meticulously, brush stroke after brush stroke, like a miniaturist. I am thinking here particularly of the portraits *Man with a Collar*, 1632,

Rembrandt

Woman with a Lace Headdress, 1633,¹ and Portrait Group of Man and Wife, 1633.² In these clever canvases the beholder can almost hear the painter's sigh of boredom. Only the appearance of the material was able to hold his attention.

A *nature-morte*, as it is trenchantly called in French, perhaps supplemented by a symbol of mortality, a skull or an hour-glass, as was then the fashion in the composition of a still-life, may well have been seen and admired by Rembrandt from the hands of contemporaries such as Jan de Heem and Willem Claesz. Heda. They had indeed raised the still-life to a high spiritual level. But Rembrandt's tempestuous, dynamic spirit could not do anything at all with it.

His talent *could* do everything, one would be inclined to say, only he seldom used pencil or engraving needle without emotion. Once, however, he gave the thing for its own sake a sublime chance: the Conch, or shell, a little etching. It is the shell of the so-called cone snail from the Indian Ocean. Probably this rarity of nature belonged to Rembrandt's collection. He etched this shell with all its patches of light and matt surfaces with indescribable concentration, devotion and patience; the subtle play of light and shade with infinite grace. Rembrandt was forty-four when in all humility he engrossed himself in the wonderful workmanship of this single shell. Perhaps this etching is most full of meaning in its first state, without

¹ Staatl. Gemäldegalerie, Cassel.

² Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

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background, with only its own shadow, the shell ringed and speckled as nature fashioned it. It lies there, gentle and extraordinarily beautiful. The front of the mother-of-pearl has most light thrown upon it; the pointed shape runs slowly into shade, a geometrical mystery, magnificently reproduced without the least embellishment. In thin letters, written with unusual loving care, he signed his name in the left-hand corner: Rembrandt f. 1650.

As a group only the nature sketches among his works can be classed in the non-metaphysical series; in them for once he did not translate reality into spiritual values. No sooner had he worked out a subject than he started the composition of the whole: the direct experience of what he saw expanded into fiction. His powerful imagination began working and dominated him. The picture gradually became imagination. There is some work of his, however, that strikes an equal balance between image and imagination. I can recall the impressive canvas *The Mill*,¹ in which the mill is set high on a bastion against a sky partly covered with heavy clouds. The part of the sky lighted by sunshine pours light right on the sails of the mill: shaped like a cross they have become immaterial pointers, neither touching nor holding the darkness, messengers of the light of a higher order of things. The etching *The Three Trees* and *The Mill* just mentioned have passed from the seen to the imagined landscape, such as only *Hercules Seghers* (he signed his name *Herkeles segers*), Rembrandt's great contemporary, has depicted

¹ Widener Collection. National Gallery of Art, Washington

with a powerful talent but in quite a different way.

The starting point of Rembrandt's imagined landscape is an emotion, symbolised in the vision of a landscape. This painting, fundamentally an abstraction, presents invented scenes of nature. Rembrandt, who had travelled so little, let his mind roam through foreign avenues, he saw mountains and rocks, created forests and waterfalls which he had never seen with his physical eyes. One of Rembrandt's biographers, C. Neumann,¹ says so rightly of this exceptional class of painting: 'One imagines seeing Beethoven sitting at the piano and hearing him improvising.' We may ask if it is therefore both romantic and unreal. Certainly, if we are going to call emotion romantic and classify imagination among unrealities. However, Rembrandt could never have created these landscapes if he had not been able to draw on the immense store of memories which his impressions of nature had given him. That is why his imaginary landscapes are always correctly ordered; there is always knowledge of the structure of nature; imagination is always kept under control and nature is faithfully composed.

The Landscape with the Three Trees,² with plateau and valley, is more fantasy than reality. I should almost say: a purely pictorial vision of the same order as 'The Landscape with Rider.'³ Neither is in conflict with visual reality, although they are primarily pure fiction. All the

¹ C. Neumann, Rembrandt, 3rd impression, 1922. Munich.

² Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, Brunswick.

³ Nasjonal Galleriet, Oslo

Landscapes

drama in Rembrandt's own soul sought escape in these imaginary landscapes, just as a sufferer from fever sees landscape after landscape go past him in his dreams.

The etching *The Three Trees* is the culminating work of this class: a landscape that suggests a landscape and at the same time is built up architecturally from the imagination. There is far more sky than ground; three trees forming a group on the right-hand half of the ridge of a hill. On the upper road a cart full of people is moving uphill, towards the light. At the top an insignificant man is sitting drawing and at the side of the lake on the left of the etching there are some indistinct people—a pair of lovers, a man fishing. The rain in the left-hand corner is coming down in torrents, and in the far distance there is a peaceful landscape, bathing and breathing in the sun. A work of imagination, partly at any rate enacted in the unconscious, to show that what is firmly rooted can stand up to storms.

Rembrandt sought peace and a harmony arising from peace first of all in a landscape, the break through of the clear sky into the firmament darkened by thunderstorms, sunbeams falling after and at the same time as heavy showers. He often painted a bridge shining with inner light and joining two banks. See for instance the little dreaming landscape on an oak panel of about 1640.¹

Imaginary nature in etching or oil-painting must have relieved and refreshed him inwardly, like sketching from

¹ Villa Favorita, Rohoncz Collection, Lugano

Rembrandt

nature. His thoughts remained unformulated, they are almost included and absorbed in a rational expression of a placeless and timeless nature. The great man of Leiden, who never saw the banks of the Tiber or the Arno, only those of the Amstel or the Vecht, who never sailed from his native shore, who never gazed on the Alps but only hills in Guelders; he used rocks and peaks, ravines and ruins lavishly in these canvases; nevertheless in each of these mountain-compositions he remained within the limits of rationality.

It is surely possible for imagination to be irrational in its expression, if it neglects the rules of composition.

Occasionally the same Rembrandt painted with laconic ease a perfectly ordinary piece of nature, seen with his bodily eyes, probably by chance, for all fortuitousness in nature surprises us without our being able to resist it; it takes us unawares.

I am thinking here for instance of the Winter Landscape of 1639.¹ It is a little panel. It is a hard winter, the pond is frozen solid, a woman with her hands in her sleeves is shuffling across it, a numbed dog trails after her. There are two skaters on the opposite side, a rather tumbledown house, a bridge, two bare willows and above a frosty sky, threatening snow. It is a candid, moving painting, deep in colour.

¹ Staatl. Gemäldegalerie, Cassel.

IV. MAN

HUMAN BEINGS enthralled Rembrandt all his life and his whole artistry was directed towards fathoming them. It may be a commonplace—everyone familiar with Rembrandt's work knows it—but it is nevertheless a good thing to repeat this over-familiar truth that we may realise it more and more clearly. He sought in human beings the hidden and nameless stirrings of their inmost lives. This field soon became so immensely great that he had no need to look far and wide for his models. His own family was enough for him. He portrayed his father, mother, brother and sister not once or twice, but continually. The slightest changes brought about by time and experience in a face captivated him so much that he painted the familiar features once more. He came to realise with the penetrating force of his observation that the individual core of the person is permanent in spite of all changes and that the expression is a constant mixing of change and durability. One model contained endless possibilities and combinations.

He looked in a face for permanent values and truths. These are rather big words, written with hesitation. If Rembrandt could read them he would no doubt frown at them. As a painter he could afford to do without words, but the writer cannot, words are his tools, and I repeat: Rembrandt looked in mortal man for immortal elements.

He did this principally in the soul-searching portraits

of his mother. How often must this busy woman have sat for him. Sometimes she seems to have done it resignedly, with a gentle smile on her lips, glad to rest on a chair. It began when he was just twenty. The young painter dressed his family up, putting a fine turban on his father's head and rigging the others up a bit, to paint *The Music Lesson* in 1626.

In her remaining years, between 1626 and 1640, when she died, Rembrandt persevered in trying to see his mother's face with penetrating understanding. She was a constant source of inspiration to him and occasionally to his colleagues, for Lievens and Dou also drew her. But it was only her son who time after time endeavoured to see deeper into this strong but gentle face. Some historians of art see a certain hardness in her face.¹ I cannot share their opinion. It is surely the mistake frequently made by men, when they confuse courage in a woman with hardness of character. Her son knew better. As his mother grew older he discovered a thousand and one characteristics in her nature which are the opposite of hardness.

All the portraits he made of her tell of the same feeling: affection. I remember being overwhelmed by this realisation when years ago, shortly after the First War, I visited a Rembrandt exhibition in Berlin. A hexagonal room was hung with nothing but portraits of Rembrandt's mother. Wherever my eye rested I met the same affection, the same sincerity. Nevertheless her son often re-created this

¹ Ludwig Münz, *Rembrandts Bild von Mutter und Vater*, Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien, Sonderheft Nr. 145.

model too in his imagination; he dressed her up and sometimes disguised her. She is the prophetess Hanna, another time Tobias' angel, a sibyl or the woman weeping for Christ at the foot of the Cross. But the fantasies are the exception. Mostly he wished to etch or draw her directly, sometimes a little adorned with perhaps rather too grand a costume for a miller's wife; but then the painting, as early as 1639 in the possession of Charles I, passed for that of the Countess of Desmond. This stately figure is none other than Neeltjen Willemsd. van Zuytbroeck.¹

There is no doubt that there is a special element in these mother-portraits, which still after centuries move the beholder, whether he will or not. This element is the tenderness with which her son has shown the ageing and aged woman. The series begins about 1628-1632, with the mother sitting, in profile, for an etching. In the year that she was widowed she has a black mourning cap on; her heavy, work-worn hands, familiar with the wash-tub, are slackly folded on her broad lap. Her mouth is tranquil and closed. She is sitting in front of a round table. The etching of a year later shows an older woman. The lower part of her body protrudes rather, as is the way with ageing women; the chin is still well-shaped, but the skin under the jaw sags. She has a kerchief knotted around her head, her gaze is steady as always, the eyelids are heavier than in the previous portraits. She is already a matriarch full of days, accepting old age without hesitation. It is as if Rembrandt found increasing fascination in this face every

¹ Windsor Castle.

Rembrandt

year. There is a small etching, with a kerchief differently folded, of 1633, still with the secret, rather mocking expression round the firmly closed mouth. Then come the profound portraits of a year before her death: the oak panel,¹ in black and white, in which a stiff cloth is fastened across the forehead; the hands once strong, are becoming wrinkled, the wedding ring, too loose, has slipped forward, and she is leaning on a stick. She no longer carries her head proudly upright, as in 1629,² but bending forward.

Finally there is the profile, with the hands raised and joined together, the attitude of prayer which the Roman Catholic Church has fortunately preserved. I shall scarcely forget seeing this portrait again after the Second War. I was being shown the restoring department, a large attic room, in the Kunsthistorisches Institut, Vienna. We were looking for a quite different portrait when my glance fell unexpectedly on this panel, Rembrandt's mother in 1639,³ a year before her death. The dimmed eyes are just peering out between half-closed eyelids, the half-opened mouth has no teeth at the top; the lower jaw still has two strong teeth. The cheeks are wrinkled and dry, the shoulders are covered with soft stuff. Everything in this picture is old and fading, only on the head is there a surprise. Her son must have wished to triumph over death and bereavement, for he draped round her old head a kerchief of vivid strawberry red. Or is it the red of warm life's blood?

¹ Kunsthistorisches Institut, Vienna.

² Windsor Castle.

³ Czernin Collection.

I have often wondered whether Rembrandt's mother posed for this portrait. Surely her son would have known her attitude at prayer through and through. The little work is painted with perfect calm on a cut copper plate.

The portraits of Rembrandt's father are painted with more coolness and, I think, without tender feelings. The son was here fascinated by his model but not attached to it. He gave his father, like all his other relations, functions in his compositions. Where Judas returns the pieces of silver, the father is one of the elders in the Temple. Another time Rembrandt dressed up his father, the miller, in great magnificence, with a steel gorget and a superb necklace and costly feathers on the velvet hat. The opulent portrait of a grand gentleman with finely chiselled features was created.¹

The question is often asked, why Rembrandt dressed his models up, and what he was seeking in doing so. Many connoisseurs of his work have to this day failed to understand, still less to appreciate, this urge in him. It is too easily forgotten that the painter had little interest in antiquity and no notion of archaeological requirements; that these disguises only represented artistic qualities for him. Contemporaries relate that he could occupy himself for days wrapping and winding cloth into a turban. His only object was to gain colour and line; when he had obtained it he saw that another potentiality of the model's essence was shown to advantage. Fantasy and wish worked fruitfully together. A miller's wife could also be an old

¹ Art Institute, Chicago.

Rembrandt

prophetess of Israel, a Leiden miller a grandee with plenty of grandeur; the surly face of his brother Adriaan, clad in armour and the splendour of a plumed helmet¹, made an impressive warrior. Saskia was turned by her painter-husband into Cleopatra, Bathsheba or Flora; Hendrickje was another Flora and even Venus, pressing her winged child to her cheek.² His creative fancy felt bound to nothing but the demands of beauty. Goethe condemned Rembrandt's slight knowledge of antiquity. Had the painter forgotten that Greeks and Romans ever existed? 'So Rembrandt exercised the highest artistic talent, for which the material and incentive in his immediate surroundings were sufficient, without having the least idea whether Greeks or Romans had ever existed on earth.'³ Jozef Israëls, in spite of his deep admiration for the master, says that he 'told Bible stories in the style of Old Amsterdam'.⁴ Jacob Burckhardt was not very happy about Rembrandt's ignorance of the ancient world and his use of costumes. Huizinga follows the same line as Burckhardt. He calls them, actually quite rightly, half-fantasies. What is the point of all these necklaces, gold chains, hats with feathers, flowing locks? He disapproves rather sharply of this urge of Rembrandt's, the mania for costume which makes the Orient and the so-called orientals into dressed-

¹ Staatliche Museen, Berlin-Dahlem.

² Louvre, Paris.

³ J. W. Goethe, *Schriften zur Kunst*, S. 700, *Ueber Kunst und Altertum in den Rhein- und Maingegenden*, 1816, Gedenkausgabe, 1949, Artemis Verlag, Zurich.

⁴ Gids, 1906.

up charade figures. He speaks of a Sunday turban, a sword from the costume box: ' . . . His vision of oriental splendour is not strong enough in beauty of shape and great style.'¹

But the point on which everything turns is that Rembrandt did not attempt archaeologically correct representation. Rather he dressed up dreams, his models were nothing but the physical phantoms of those dreams, and though they might have a shimmer of other worlds he wanted them to be above all enthralling to his eye. Rembrandt's visions were not at all concerned with whether they were historically correct. It therefore seems to me that Huizinga has not understood the essence of Rembrandt's play with his models. Actually he played on the individuality of his models, he gently moved the centre of gravity of the impression—in music this is called the keynote of the chord—and behold the same people remained themselves, but at the same time represented other beings. Rembrandt was their producer and afterwards their painter; they were his models and actors and they had to take part in the divine play of his imagination.

The remarkable thing about this visionary world is that it never severed an essential and very sound contact with reality. It never became an experimental artistic stunt, far from it.

One of his favourite models for the play of his imagination was Titus, his son. He only had to look at the boy for his imagination to quicken and to soar. The child summoned

¹ Huizinga, *Verzamelde Werken*, II, 491-492, Tjeenk Willink, Haarlem.

Rembrandt

up visions of heavenly kingdoms for him. However harassed and imprisoned in material misfortunes he might be, Titus' portraits released and invigorated him. The boy was only of a tender age when his father painted him as a fairy-tale prince.¹ Titus, Saskia's only surviving child, called into being one vision after another for him. The faithful Hendrickje Stoffels looked after him and loved him, Rembrandt appears to have worshipped him. He caressed this model with his eye and with his brush; he was the Christ-child, Hanna's child, the strong-winged angel in Jacob's wrestling, the angel, God's servant, who whispers to the evangelist Matthew. Official theology may have some difficulty with the angels and cherubim of the Old and New Testament and be reluctant to explain them fully. Rembrandt found nothing to explain, nor to discuss. In his time theological discussions were sharp and fierce, one party opposing the other, but what concern was this of the painter? His profound gaze had only to rest on Titus. Did he need to explain anything more? He had only to let his glance roam to realise that in the community of men, in secret, beings lived whom he could re-create as angels.

Sometimes he painted Titus in the ordinary way, as his physical eyes saw the boy and everything about him; in his thirteenth year, thinking hard about a school exercise, his thumb stuck into his chin:² another time reading,³ a

¹ Herbert Cook Collection, Richmond.

² Boymans Museum, Rotterdam.

³ Kunsthistorisches Institut, Vienna.

painting conceived with such intensity that it presents not only Titus reading but forces the ideas of reading and concentration on the spectator.

There is another portrait of Titus, prominent in the long series. It is *The Polish Horseman*, of about 1655.¹ The boy must be about thirteen years old in it, his father was then nearly fifty. He was deeply involved in money troubles and the bankruptcy was threatening. He was hedged in by obligations he could not meet and for a long time he had been unable to earn his living by painting. But his eyes saw Titus and he put him once more on canvas. He made a proud Polish horseman of him, mounted on a grey. He is only slightly Polish: Huizinga would perhaps venture to suggest the costume-mania. The clothes resemble the uniform of a certain Lysowski regiment. The horse is not a great success. Why is the mouth open when the reins are slack? But the imperfections are resolved in the grandiose conception. The young horseman is perfect in mind and body. He is sitting on a thin saddle with a panther skin as saddle cloth. He is carrying a full quiver and holding a riding whip with a certain bold flourish in his right hand; the left hand holds the Russian leather reins loosely. The attitude is perfect. The head is turned to the right, almost full face, and the expression has a sort of innocent candour, such as boys can have who have never been disappointed in anything. A young lad who believes in life, he has a natural self-assurance, such as Rembrandt saw and painted in him time and again, drawing encouragement from it for himself.

¹ Frick Collection, New York.

Rembrandt

The background is imaginary, a ruined castle on a hill-top. The colouring is white, golden yellow and red against the background of evening twilight.

It may well be doubted whether Titus' father always saw his son as such a radiant figure. There is a Christ at the Column¹ of 1646, usually just called 'Titus'. The attendants at the museum too call it this without any hesitation. I think it must be an oral tradition, of which the origin cannot be traced. But at the time that this work was done Titus cannot have been more than about five years old. Was the thin and sickly child the model for this vision of a red-haired Christ? The remarkable thing about this painting is that it is not reminiscent of a Rembrandtesque Christ nor of Rembrandt's son Titus. Maybe it is a dream of a feeling of pity. Pity for the fact that even the dearest on earth is doomed to suffering.

Rembrandt's portraits of women form quite a special subject in his work. They could be called variations on three basic themes: his mother, Saskia and Hendrickje. In the simplicity of his nature he always liked painting those he loved and turned away from those who repelled him. His brush knew neither hell or devil.

Saskia is the subject of many youthful portraits, painted in the springtime of their marriage, in which Rembrandt—and this is a great exception—has portrayed himself laughing. He did not give much consideration to the laugh and its whole range of outbursts, leaving this to Jan Steen

¹ Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne.

and Frans Hals; only in Saskia he looked again and again for the secret smile, the glad trembling at the corners of the mouth. One of the first portraits of the two of them is full of loving merriment. The young Saskia is sitting on his knee, he himself is slightly tipsy, raising the tall glass of wine with a rather uncertain gesture.¹

It was one of his life's pleasures to dress up and adorn Saskia. One of the most striking conceptions of her is the *Flora* of 1634,² with the dreamy gaze of a woman in her first pregnancy, flowers in her hair, a flowered staff in her hand. A remarkable atmosphere permeates this painting; it is as if Saskia murmurs: play with me but do not touch me.

The Saskia portraits are too numerous to summarise: they form a great and long series, culminating in the dark, heavily-lined drawing of Saskia, seriously ill in bed, gazing in front of her.³ Dying in 1642 she still revisits Rembrandt's work repeatedly, for she lived on in his memory, that made his imagination fertile. The *Flora* canvas of 1655,⁴ in which she returns as a vision, is remarkable and irresistibly moving, for Saskia had gone from him thirteen years before. She is a serious young woman, giving away her flowers. Her dress is soft and of a very light colour. Her face is an amalgam of Saskia's and Hendrickje's features—it has that intangible something that Rembrandt's people can possess.

¹ Königl. Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.

² Hermitage, Leningrad.

³ Print Room, Munich.

⁴ Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Rembrandt

They become beings who glide through time and space. Flora here has greenery and flowers in her hair and a flower in her hand, which she innocently wants to give away. I do not know any portrait of a woman by Rembrandt with such a vigorous interplay of sensuality and spirituality.

Rembrandt regularly painted nudes, but it is only seldom that they fully inspired him. As a rule he used them as practice for his urge to draw. I remember a conversation I once had with a historian of art, the director of a well-known museum. He asserted that Rembrandt was never really enraptured by the female nude. I hesitate, indeed I refuse to agree. It was only that for him the beautiful was interwoven with affection.

As I have already said, the three women to whom he was devoted were his mother, Saskia and Hendrickje; other women, clothed or unclothed, were subjects for hasty sketches. Saskia and Hendrickje remained his silent delight, undiminished by the course of years: these two women alone were the objects of his body's and his soul's longing. Nevertheless he often sketched other women in rapid lines, the cake maker by the roadside, or women trying to cope with screaming or naughty children, others teaching a toddler to walk. He drew them without an ounce of sentimentality, but if he painted a nude, spiritual truths stimulated him at once, although he did not abandon sensual disturbance in them. Rembrandt never had anything to do with an ascetic estimate of women, but eroticism in him could not hold its own against spiritual delights.

It is as unreasonable as it is incorrect however to state that nudes did not enthrall him. In the sale of his possessions there was a portfolio called 'a book full of drawings done by Rembrandt consisting of men and women: being naked'.¹

His unclothed female figures nearly all remain modest. They are sitting or standing, they have not abandoned their sense of shame, they bend forward somewhat and do not give themselves unreservedly; they usually hide the pudenda from the observer's gaze. This is in great contrast to Rembrandt's contemporary Peter Paul Rubens, of whom Paul Claudel once remarked that his nudes recalled an armful of roses in June. Naked women are not roses at all in Rembrandt's work, they do not even suggest flowers. Verhaeren once observed rather peevishly that Rembrandt's Diana in the Bath had not come down from Olympus but out of the kitchen. The painter did not care a straw for classical beauty. He looked for quite different values, and they represented his concept of beauty. According to his view of life there was nothing evil about nakedness: he had a compassionate love even for what was not beautiful. Again it is Verhaeren who sums this up strikingly: 'Il est la matière dont est faite l'humanité triste et belle, pitoyable et magnifique, douce et violente. Les corps les plus déjetés il les aime de tout son amour de la vie.'²

Those who can look at Rembrandt's work and make these words their own will begin to feel something of the

¹ Hofstede de Groot, *Urkunden*.

² Emile Verhaeren, *Rembrandt*.

Rembrandt

emotion burning in the artist during the creation of his greatest etchings of nude models. I am thinking here in particular of *The Boys Bathing* (1651), *Diana in the Bath* (1631), *Jupiter and Antiope*, etched in 1631 and 1659, *the Sleeping Negress*, an etching of 1658, and most of all a female nude, lying on her right side, a very noble drawing.¹ And then there is the climax of the series, *Bathsheba* (1654),² one of the finest nudes in the painting of that century. Endless studies and corrections enabled Rembrandt to fashion the model entirely according to his own style, neither sensually nor frivolously, with an extremely keen eye for the natural. X-ray photographs show that he worked at it continually and repeatedly corrected his first inspiration without being unfaithful to it. With infinite patience he searched for the right inclination of the head, till at last he captured the position which has fascinated the beholders of this canvas for three centuries. *Bathsheba-Hendrickje*, just out of her bath, sits deep in thought while an old attendant dries her feet. A subject could hardly be simpler. The canvas is undiluted Rembrandt: reverence for the living in all its outward forms: the fall of light that lifts the subject matter out of the temporal, removes the mortal to higher spheres.

The first glance at Rembrandt's long line of portraits shows how the subjects of his choice differ from the commissioned portraits. It is as if he lived in another world while etching and painting the men of the Jewish com-

¹ Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam.

² Louvre, Paris.

Man

munity living at that time in Amsterdam. This community fascinated him intensely, for it comprised people who shared the immemorial obloquy of Israel, who had nothing to lose and everything to gain. He could read things in these faces. Let me mention only two names, Menasseh ben Israel, the theologian, and Ephraim Bueno, the doctor. Then the world that captivated the painter indeed becomes different. He does not need to save himself by concentration on unimaginative clothes, for he has lived in these Jewish faces, he has listened to his models. What a difference from the uninspired commissions, the portraits that have no name in the list of his works: a Man, a Woman, a Married Couple, The Woman with a Fan, The Man with a Glove, etc. Portraits of this kind have been frozen into still life, stagnant water, in which the human being, as Rembrandt understood him, did not exist. Only cambric, snow-white, bodices, neatly fastened, deep black velvet hats still live in them. You forget the face as soon as you turn away from the canvas. Perhaps you feel just a flicker of satisfaction that Rembrandt received some payment now and then.

It would be a mistake to conclude that anonymous portraits are always commissioned portraits, which did not move him artistically. There are many portraits without a name painted by the artist with full intensity. I am thinking of the portrait in the Uffizi, called *Ritratto di un vecchio*, with the supposed date 1658. There is a justified assumption that it represents Comenius, the exiled bishop,

Rembrandt

who came for the second time to Amsterdam in 1657, then as the guest of the De Geer family.¹

Rembrandt's impetuous spirit must have roamed and searched far for the etching of Dr. Faustus, of about 1652. It is not entirely finished, but it is not a fragmentary piece of work. Other great works were done in that year: Nicolaas Bruyninck,² Hendrickje twice, the scholar with the bust of Homer and many other works as well. He certainly filled up the twenty-four hours.

One wonders whether Rembrandt wished to depict a musing alchemist in the etching of Dr. Faustus, or whether he was inspired by an English touring company that performed Marlowe's Faust, *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, in Amsterdam. We do not know, and it may also be that Rembrandt had read the popular story of Faust in a Dutch version, for it was circulating as early as 1638. It was not till the eighteenth century that his etching was definitely named Dr. Faustus, when Goethe, in his first edition of *Faust* in 1790, used a copy of it by J. H. Lips as an illustration.

The etching shows a scholar in his study surrounded by papers and old books, a skull and a globe. The man is standing by a table, pale as death, spellbound by a vision of light shining, dazzling, through a glass door. He is supporting himself on both fists as if he is having difficulty

¹ There are Czech writings on this assumption, among others by Gamma in *Novina*, October number, 1915.

² *Staatl. Gemäldegalerie, Cassel.*

in remaining upright in the stress of his emotion. This vision is a disc of light, three magic circles, an anagram with the letters INRI in the centre. The deciphering of the anagram is a matter for speculation. It seems to me that Rembrandt, a believer in the Bible, was inspired here by the words of St. Paul: 'for now we see through a glass, darkly.'¹ In the vision there is a hand, reminiscent of the hand on the white wall of King Belshazzar's palace. In this etching it points, on the right under the anagram, to a round disc or mirror. In the occult sciences it used to be reflections, the reflected image, that gave revelations. Rembrandt must have known about these things.²

We do not know to what extent Rembrandt was in contact with the Caballa and the works of Paracelsus. To judge by this composition, these sources were not unknown to him.

The important thing in this composition is that the artist's genius has placed Christ's monogram INRI in the centre of the vision of light. Faust, who has a globe and a skull in his room, but no crucifix, receives what is for him

¹ I Cor. 13, 12. The word 'darkly' in the Authorised and revised Versions does not fully explain this allusion. The Dutch Authorised Version has *in duistere rede*, in obscure speech, which is nearer to the Greek *ἐν αἰνυγματι*, in an enigma or riddle. (*Translator*.)

² Those who wish to go further into the explanation of the anagram can consult: Martin Bojanowsky, *Das Anagramm in Rembrandts Faust*, *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft u. Geistesgeschichte*, 1913, p. 527. E. Kieser wrote a continuation of this in the same periodical, 1912 volume, p. 112. Bojanowsky answered him in the same volume, p. 467. See also Hans-Martin Rotermund, *Rembrandts Faust im Licht der neuere Forschung*, *Sammlung*, June 1912.

Rembrandt

a new revelation to comprehend. Shadows, columns of smoke, anagrams, magic circles can raise or carry away the spirit, but they cannot be the essence of enigma or its solution.

In this etching too, Rembrandt, believer and thinker, adhered to secrecy and mystery. They continue to exist in the midst of a supernatural and supersensory revelation.

In portraits, whether painted, drawn or etched, Rembrandt looked for the human being in his inner life. He followed the same path in the self-portraits.

The long line of this class of picture that he left is unique in the art of the Netherlands, as it is in that of other countries. Never before nor after him has a painter made such a great series of self-portraits. About ninety have been counted; if those that must have been lost are added, the hundred is reached. As many as sixty of the surviving ninety are oil-paintings. He never made any money by these portraits; there was little demand for the self-portrait. They must have sprung from an irrepressible urge to bring out into the open the most individual, most personal part of the human being, of himself, and to reproduce it as art.

It is not really correct for writers, both past and present to speak of this series as though it were an autobiography in pictures. This is what self-portraits never are. The primary characteristic of literary autobiography is retrospection, always accompanied by understanding and judgment. However conversational it may be, it is always

preceded by a classification of facts, a qualitative estimate of events by the writer. The autobiographer does nothing in the first place but sift, value and revalue, now that he can reflect on the course of his life from a distance. The self-portrait, on the other hand, captures a moment of time. Its parallel in letters is the diary, or journal, that aims at the same thing. Rembrandt's self-portraits are the long day-to-day story of a whole life. He is the model and the painter in one person; the one who asks and the one who answers; a duologue in the form of a monologue. Only a strong spirit, a rigorous nature can bear it; it would have destroyed a weakling.

By no means all the self-portraits are first-class artistic achievements. Rembrandt often scratched hastily on a plate or drew rapidly, but the finished portraits are the majority. In one of the earliest self-portraits that attract attention the painter is about twenty-four; it therefore dates from 1630.¹ This was the year he lost his father and was to go and live on his own in Amsterdam, in the full confidence that he could make a career for himself as a painter. The young man in the portrait is virile. The head is set proudly on the well-formed shoulder. The metal gorget was not necessary to enhance the aggressiveness of the expression. It radiates from the whole face. The young head is covered with wavy, light brown locks; the furrows between the eyebrows, to become deeper and deeper in later years, is already shown as a slight shadow. Shade falls on the left side of the face; on the right side, the nose

¹ Mauritshuis, The Hague.

and its base, light. It is already the style which Rembrandt was to make his own: making every portrait, whether painted, drawn or etched, in a contrast of light and shade, raising antithesis to synthesis.

He did all kinds of heads of himself, passing moods rapidly caught on canvas, paper or engraving plate. The facial expressions are an actor's studies in a mirror, angry, surprised, grinning, dreamy. In the Passion pictures for Frederik Hendrik he appears in the Elevation of the Cross and in the Descent. Between 1630 and 1648 he constantly posed carefully before the mirror before painting himself. He is always noticeably richly dressed and tricked out as a *grand seigneur*, which he never was. He keeps on showing himself as *bel homme*, though the eyes remain serious and searching. I regard this love of finery quite differently from Menno ter Braak,¹ who sees the parvenu in the finely arrayed painter. It is the man who wants to get out of the everyday and uses disguise to escape from reality.

Around 1648 there is suddenly an etched self-portrait from which all trappings and smartness have been banished. The painter is sitting at a desk, a pencil in his right hand, an ordinary cap on his head, everything seen directly. The portrait says inexorably: this is what I am like. The forehead is wrinkled, the lips closed firmly, almost grimly; the determined gaze of someone going his own lonely way. Portrait after portrait follows, till about 1654 a change can clearly be detected in the closed face of this man.

¹ Menno ter Braak, *Verzameld Werk*, part 4: 'Wie was Rembrandt?' 1951.
G. A. van Oorschot, Amsterdam.

Man

The painter knows that the man inexorably shown him by the mirror is surrounded by torments and tempests. One of the portraits in this series is the head that takes up the whole canvas.¹ The furrow between the brows is deeper, the eyes are rather tired and no longer pursue their quarry throughout the wide world; the gaze is turned inward. Unexpressed, inexpressible thoughts fill his mind as he thinks and ponders: his mouth is wordless. The portraits of the period explain the remark by his contemporary Hoogstraten, who, fond of a chat with Rembrandt, was once told 'to put into effect what he already knew': in other words, to act and not to talk. The gaze is that of one who no longer values quantity, only quality, in life, and is conscious of the gulf between himself and the crowd, accepting his own solitariness. The portraits that come after these are variations on the same theme. Sometimes the emphasis is on haughtiness, then the taut line is conspicuous, till about 1660 Rembrandt suddenly sees himself as an ordinary man among other people, painting, working, unwearying. The most impressive portrait of this phase is a life-size oil-painting.² The face is full of humility, which is only another form of courage, and there is a touch of dry humour in it, the two qualities which he so much liked to show in the portraits of his mother. Here he is then, life-size, his faithful palette in his left hand, with brushes and maulstick, the instruments with which he created his powerful colours. His

¹ Kunsthistorisches Institut, Vienna.

² Kenwood House, London.

Rembrandt

coat, an ordinary studio loose jacket, has red undertones; the apron and cap—or is it a headcloth?—are white. He still has the great mane of wavy hair, but now greyish-white. He is a man who knows his strength and the transitoriness of all strength. On both sides two large circles are drawn in the background. These round surfaces, clearly outlined, may have a cabalistic meaning. It is said that the circle is on the one hand the sign of God, on the other of the sun, that is to say of light, which Rembrandt tried to express all his life. Faust also saw three concentric circles in the vision of light that appeared to him and nearly destroyed him. We shall never find out what the painter really meant here. These circles were full of meaning for Rembrandt. He may have known something of Mangola and the Persians, of Jacob Boehme and his writings, that speak of the deep significance of the circle, but I prefer to believe that he knew the last canto, the 33rd, of Dante's *Paradiso*, in which he speaks of the circle which, reflecting God, becomes one with the human face.¹

How can Rembrandt have come by this knowledge? Huygens, with Hooft, was one of the very few who read Dante then, and Huygens had a *Commedia* in his library. There were no Dutch translations of it in Rembrandt's time. A silent nature such as his no doubt gained much knowledge and wisdom from intimate conversation. I am sure that he could ask profound questions and listen attentively. Is the background of this portrait Dantesque? One would be inclined to say so.

¹ Verses 137-138.

Man

Rembrandt remained faithful to himself and kept the secret of hidden things in his mind. Man can very occasionally penetrate from the surface to the heart of matter, from the world of sensory perception to the domain of spiritual experience. But the mirror into whose reflection he gazes remains dumb.

One of the last self-portraits, of 1665, is surprising¹: a prematurely aged man, bending forward, the head drooping, the face laughing. Is the laugh a smile or a sob or both, as often happens with those who are growing weak? There is a slight suggestion of senility in the expression. There is no longer clothing to decorate head and shoulders, only a cloth or shawl of nameless colours. The tints of this self-portrait are the yellow and above all the brown of still leafy trees on a sun-drenched autumn day. The gaze of the tired eyes, the gentleness of the smile, are surely characteristic of a human being on the tenuous borderline between struggle and surrender.

The beholder, gazing at this canvas, seems to hear the murmured words: 'Ay, every inch a king.'

V. CHRIST

IN REMBRANDT'S AGE the Holy Scriptures were the centre of everyone's interest. The Authorised Version—*Statenvertaling* is the proud name the Dutch gave it—was the monument of that time. It resulted in the book of life being taken as the point of departure in religious, political and ecclesiastical dispute. Rembrandt shared this attachment to the Bible with thousands of his countrymen. He knew Christianity, as seen from the Bible stories, from his early youth. These stories were the spiritual property of family and school. This attachment, which was not destroyed by the religious persecutions but had arisen in them and created an acquired tradition in the history of the Dutch people, identifying it with the history of Israel; this special attachment it was that liked to see in the stories of the Old and the New Testament an earlier representation of recent events.

The material of the Bible was therefore common property. If a subject from the Testaments was mentioned, everyone knew what it was about, people's eyes visualised the event in question at once. Simple people and intellectuals, Reformed as well as Roman Catholic, knew the stories from the Creation to the infallibility of the Revelation, including the Apocrypha. However, common property inevitably means becoming commonplace. Bible scenes were not only embroidered on chasubles or altar cloths with silk and gold thread; they were also engraved on silver dishes and salt cellars, painted on plates and tiles

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and carved on gable stones. The woman taken in adultery was represented on the lid of a valuable tobacco box; a child's chair was carved, as well as might be, with the figure of Jesus blessing the children. The Bible story was nothing out of the way—it belonged to everyday life. People were only too fond of cherishing the safe idea that they formed a part of such a story. Manna, bread and blessings were certainly for them too. When painters drew their own features in the Shepherds at the Manger, in the Prodigal Son, in the workmen engaged in the Elevation of the Cross, or the Descent, it was in all seriousness. They were part of the event, for their whole existence was imbued with the sacred story.

Rembrandt showed no interest in his work in the ecclesiastical dispute that flared up in the 17th century—for the intellectuals tried not only to live according to the Bible but to explain it line by line. It is not known which Bible he used. The old Bible mentioned in the inventory of his possessions was perhaps a Biestkens Bible. We do not know. He must have been interested in the Baptists, a Danish contemporary said. And particularly in the Waterland Baptists? It is possible, for this sect laid stress on a Christ who came for publicans, but it is not known whether he was connected with them by membership. There is still earnest investigation into whether Rembrandt belonged to any religious body and which it could have been. I think it is hardly an important point. His work, comprising Bible subjects, is a powerful, continual portrayal of his soul's emotions. It tells more of Rembrandt's

religious life, of his vivid relation to a revealed God, than whether he was a member of some sect or other, or not. He had his children baptised, his parents and he himself were married in church, but he can certainly never have been a member of a church in the full sense of the word. He was unsociable and surly, in religious matters just as surely as in any others. His solitary mind sought its own path outside any community of people. It is arrant pedantry to think that a nature like that of Rembrandt van Rijn was really closely connected with any particular sect. Profound conversations are much more likely to have affected his inner development. He was in close contact with a few choice spirits, as one can see from the portraits. They are likenesses of people whom he knew through and through. There was Menasseh ben Israel, a man of high intelligence, who lived almost opposite him in the Bree-straat and whose father had been tortured three times by the Inquisition. The family fled to La Rochelle, the Protestant seaport infected by tolerance. Then they arrived, weary and burdened, in Amsterdam. Rembrandt must have heard many such stories of persecution and flight.

In Amsterdam Menasseh ben Israel learned from the famous Rabbi Uziel. Rembrandt made four small etchings for Menasseh's book, *Piedra Gloriosa*.

It cannot be imagined either that Rembrandt would ever have probed the melancholy gaze of Dr. Ephraim Bueno if he had not known him well. The portraits of Johannes Cornelius Sylvius, Cornelis Claesz. Anslo and Jan Uytenbogaert also give evidence of contact. But there

are more: Ferdinand Bol, Jan Asselijn, Jan Six, Clement de Jonghe, Thomas Haringh and Jacob Thomas Haringh, Abraham Francen, Dr. Arnold Tholinx, Lieven Coppenol and Johannes Lutma. There is the canvas that excels them all of Six, later mayor of Amsterdam.¹ Conversation and the exchange of ideas with this élite doubtless sharpened Rembrandt's own mind, touched and fructified his enclosed soul and enabled him to discover mysteries. One of the few sayings of Rembrandt's that has been preserved is: 'See that you learn to put into practice what you know already and you will discover soon enough the mysteries about which you are enquiring.'² It is the self-educated man, seeking quiet in order to think creatively, who speaks in these words.

On the technical side of painting he looked for and found a treatment of the material entirely in his own way, although he could build on the great tradition of the Van Eycks. In the world of the spiritual he followed the way he had discovered himself without ever accepting one particular explanation, one special truth. He directed his attention to the same Bible story repeated! sometimes in the same year. In 1648, the year of the Peace of Munster, but also the year of the great pogrom in Poland, of which Rembrandt no doubt heard, he twice painted the disciples of Emmaus;³ he made a painting of the Good Samaritan and eight drawings on this subject, and then a series of

¹ Six Museum, Amsterdam.

² Samuel van Hoogstraten, op. cit.

³ Louvre, Paris; Statens Museum, Copenhagen.

Rembrandt

studies of Christ. His work includes about 145 paintings, 575 drawings and seventy etchings on biblical subjects. The statistical plan can also be given as follows: he dealt with the story of Abraham about thirty-one times, fourteen or fifteen times with the parable of the Good Samaritan, eighteen times with Christ with the disciples at Emmaus. On the other hand the eschatological subjects of the late Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Baroque, namely pictures of the Last Judgment, the Resurrection and the Ascension hardly received his attention. But it may be supposed that as a Leiden schoolboy he often looked at the triptych of the Last Judgment by Lucas van Leyden.

In his collection of later years he had countless prints of Raphael and Rubens, in which he could study the subject of the last things. They taught him much and inspired him but he seldom adopted the subjects. Perhaps he shrank from hell fire and damnation, worship and glorification. The solitary genius may have been too humble to venture on spectacular subjects. Neither the spirit of Phaeton nor that of Prometheus drove him forward, though driven forward he was, albeit by motives from another realm of the mind: a sense of humanity and compassion. This is the reason for his constant meditation on forgiveness and mercy, his many pictures of the Good Samaritan. In the Prodigal Son he places the emphasis on the forgiving father. His interest never wavered in the story of the risen Christ at Emmaus, where the disciples gain recognition of him during a commonplace act: the

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breaking of bread, a recurrent daily incident that at Emmaus contains a divine event, visible to those who can see with the eyes of the spirit.

Rembrandt's development in compassion and emotion can be traced in many places to his long life's work. As a young painter he chose subjects such as would naturally excite a young and impetuous artist, the Driving of the Money Changers from the Temple, the Blinding of Samson by the Philistines, but at the age of twenty-three he had already painted King Saul, listening to David's music. The Bible tells us that the spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, so that he was wrathful and aggressive; he stares, in this youthful work of Rembrandt's, rigid with anger, sideways at the young David, of whom he is murderously jealous.¹

When Rembrandt was about sixty he painted the same subject: Saul and David.² He has given humanity the unforgettable portrait of two people each representing a world of his own: David, playing the harp and Saul, mollified against his will. Emotion through music: a single harp-player dispels the evil spirits with his playing. In that one right eye Rembrandt painted with infinite pity Saul's defeated and broken heart: power conquered by strength.

Rembrandt's people are often deep in prayer. There is much prayer in the etchings and canvases from David to Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. I am thinking here of the old man beside the bed of the mortally sick woman,³

¹ Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt.

² Mauritshuis, The Hague.

³ Musée Bonnat, Bayonne.

Rembrandt

the canvas *Manoah's Sacrifice*,¹ and so many other portrayals. They are not so much passionate as profound prayers; not entreaties that rend the heavens so much as humble murmurings about the eternal question: may this cup pass from my lips? The more spiritualised Rembrandt's painting is, the more tender, the more immaterial the movements and also the attitude in prayer become. I am sometimes inclined to see the gesture of the man in the canvas *The Jewish Bride* as one of prayer and protection. In any case it is a movement of the hands full of tender piety. 'Rembrandt goes so deeply into the mystery that he says things for which no words exist in any language', Vincent van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo about this painting.²

The feeling of faith in the rendering of biblical subjects is perhaps most pregnantly expressed in the innumerable series of scribbled drawings. They are only strokes and lines made in great excitement and feverish haste, but with miraculous expression of outline and volume. I have wondered a thousand times why in the world it is just these unfinished scrawls that are so eloquent. To contradict them is impossible, to refute the purport will not succeed. A foot is no more than a stroke, two curved lines are enough to give volume of clothing and body. When I gaze at these drawings I think of that single word of Pascal's—he wrote it above his *Pensées*—*Feu*: a word that

¹ Königl. Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.

² *Verzamelde Brieven*, October, 1885, part 4, 1912, Wereldbibliotheek, Amsterdam.

in this connection hardly needs explanation. Fire, a mighty fire, burns in the hundreds of lines of Rembrandt's biblical sketches. Every sketch is a breathless avowal, even including those places where the sketching does not correspond to sensory reality. Notwithstanding all imperfections they remain true and real. In the medley of strokes, lines, twists and angles, he sought from the first moment a spiritual interpretation of the story, dominating the sensory inexactitude. There are scratches and strokes which sometimes remind me of a larva before its chrysalisation, of Egyptian hieroglyphics, of just a mass of crooked lines, indecipherable separately but together, and at the first glance, conjuring up the full opulence of the Bible story. Moses' ark of bullrushes¹ with the maid of Pharaoh's daughter hastily pulling it out of the flags; Elisha and the Shunamite²—the latter's right hand was given only four fingers—give the story in full glory almost without a medium.

I often wonder if these sketches of Rembrandt's have anything to do with existential art, which only aims at reproducing the essence. They are effective because the essence is the real heart of the matter. The beholder does not look for the subject, but the content breaks through the still imperfect form. Why are these scrawls so moving? Felix Timmermans would probably have said that they move us because they touch the core of the soul. There is a story about the Japanese draughtsman Hokussay; let us

¹ Print Room, Amsterdam.

² Print Room, Amsterdam.

hope that it is true. The artist, being old and mature—maturity is evidently more important here than being old—hoped to draw in such a way that every stroke of his pen expressed life. Did this process of growth indeed take place in Rembrandt? Is each scratch on a plate, each stroke on canvas or paper, a living sign giving the Bible story immortality?

The restlessness, the rapidity with which Rembrandt worked were no doubt the cause of his making mistakes in drawing, even in paintings, and of his not correcting the mistakes. Mistakes occur in the collision between intense seeing, vehement feeling and rapid working. I studied a small oil-painting of his, Christ hanging with bowed head on the Cross.¹ It is painted in bronze-green tones with complete dedication of colours. The passion for colours is hardly concealed, but a remarkable mistake remained uncorrected: Christ has two right hands by which he is nailed to the Cross. Margaretha Trip, née de Geer,² has two hands of which one must be wrongly drawn, as they do not match at all; the left hand is strongly built, the right, clutching a handkerchief, is slender. These strange imperfections must have annoyed Rembrandt's contemporaries. He is said once to have replied, when asked why he did not finish his work: 'A work is finished when the master has achieved his purpose in it.'³

The subject was more important to him than the form.

¹ Musée Bonnat, Bayonne.

² National Gallery, London.

³ Houbraken, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

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He raced through the forms first of all with needle, pen or pencil to capture and fix the spiritual emotion. Perfection of form as understood by Albrecht Dürer or Holbein, for instance, would have strained his patience to the breaking point.

He could express spiritual truths by contrasts of light and shade. It is not without danger to speak or write about this, for it is a truism to say that Rembrandt was the painter of light and darkness. They were for him the most perfect symbols of the world's contrasts—death and life, sin and innocence, beginning and continuation, the kingdom of earth and the kingdom of heaven. Every beginning in the world of the spirit is dark, every completion is light. He even plunged the story of the manger into dusky shadows once or twice, for is not this story the great beginning of all things? The light coming from heaven, the intervention of God's kingdom on earth, that separates the earthly from the heavenly realm, he sometimes gives with hard, straight-drawn diagonals which do not give way to any resistance. He knew that he was faced by an insoluble task: neither spiritual nor material light can be painted. The palette contains many colours but not one ray of sunlight. Therefore Rembrandt, the mixer and connoisseur of colours, studied and treated the basis of his painting with inimitable wisdom and talent. Modern chemical and X-ray investigations have shown that he was always wanting to try something new, to refine his method, to change it in one way or another. He chose linens of different kinds, thin, less thin, occasionally coarse, preferably with-

out seams, even if it was a panel. But it is not possible to theorise, for the portrait of Saskia¹ is a panel of four pieces. He varied the priming endlessly so as to achieve the unattainable in the top layer: lustre and light. Saskia's red cap with precious stones acquires a radiant sheen when the strong light of a lamp falls on it: the gems come to life. The Winter Landscape² has chalk or half chalk as base, very thin, and then a layer of ochre. The portrait of Nicolaas Bruyninck³ is entirely of fine linen and doubled, the base is thin reddish and light grey bole, to name only a few details of his varied and complicated way of working.

Canvases and panels which are apocryphal and perhaps not by Rembrandt are shown, when examined by modern techniques, to have less elaborate priming and sometimes none at all. I am thinking here in particular of *The Good Samaritan*⁴. The apocryphal paintings appear, when modern technique literally sounds them, to be un-Rembrandtesque in their process.

In his early life Rembrandt was fond of using wood, especially chopped oakwood, although one of the paintings of Emmaus in the Louvre, of 1648, is on mahogany, Acajou d'Antilles, Swietania Mahagoni: a sort of wood that Rembrandt must have got hold of by chance as this scarce import dates from the end of the 17th century.

¹ Landesmuseum, Cassel.

² Landesmuseum, Cassel.

³ Landesmuseum, Cassel.

⁴ Louvre, Paris.

Christ

Rising above the material Rembrandt continued working energetically in a surge of inspiration.

His literal faith was not afraid of representing angels. He transposed the voice of God into the visual and painted an angel. If the Holy Scriptures spoke of an angel, he did not waver. He liked to show the angel in action, standing, walking, grasping, saying halt, protecting and intervening. Perhaps Rembrandt's young angels are not very successful from an artistic point of view. His *putti* lack the grace and sparkling gaiety of Baroque, nor had he the light touch and cheerful colouring of, say, Peter Paul Rubens. In the canvas of the Holy Family with the Angels¹ the descending angels are like rather unattractive babies with absurd wings. Rembrandt's pictures of the Holy Family without angels are much more convincing, though the sheer grace of a Flemish or Italian Madonna must not be looked for in his Marys. Goethe's liberal mind is just able to defend them: 'When Rembrandt makes his Mother of God with the Child like a Dutch peasant, of course anyone can see that violence has been done to history, which says that Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judaea.' But he continues quietly: 'He will say that the Italians did this much better. But how? Did Raphael paint anything other than a mother with her first, her only child?'²

There is an etching of 1654, the Holy Family with the Cat. The French call it *La Vierge au chat*, which sounds

¹ Hermitage, Leningrad.

² Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Schriften zur Kunst*, p. 52. Gedenkausgabe 1919, Artemis Verlag, Zurich.

Rembrandt

more tender and is more in keeping with the interpretation. Mary is sitting on a raised platform, leaning forward, pressing the sleeping child to her, caressing it with her own left cheek, an attitude which Rembrandt seems to have taken from Mantegna. One talent fructifies another, nothing is more inspiring than this conscious or unconscious transmission of motifs and interpretations. In the Rembrandt rays of light emanate from Mother and Child, one and the same source of light, though each has its radiation. Mother and Child are still associated and Rembrandt gave them one aureole of light. Joseph is entirely of the earth and is not illuminated, as he looks out of the window. Rembrandt added a motif of his own to the painting: Mary has a snake under her heel, a piece of sacred symbolism, showing that the head of evil will be crushed.

Rembrandt's adult and contemplative angels, often with the features of his son Titus, are much more beautiful and convincing than his *putti*. The whispering angel at St. Matthew's right ear¹ is a highly spiritualised figure, without sex, of great inspiration and serenity, a messenger from a kingdom above the earth.

Rembrandt's representation of the angel wrestling with Jacob² is very moving. The angel, an adult being, is seated upon Jacob, who is doubly clasped between his right and left leg and his right and left arm. The angel's left hand rests on Jacob's hip muscle to effect the dislocation. The remarkable thing about the action is that it is taking place

¹ Louvre, Paris.

² Staatliche Museen, Berlin-Dahlem.

Christ

without any trace of force. Divine power never uses force in Rembrandt's work. The angel has seized the conquered Jacob without destroying him, rather he embraces him. Jacob sinks overcome in the embrace. The angel looks down on his defeated adversary full of pity; they both seem to be ascending without material weight. Rembrandt seldom expressed the triumph of the spirit so clearly with material means.

There are certain subjects which retained their hold on Rembrandt throughout his career as a painter. Sometimes, after only short intervals, he returned to them, changed the previous composition, tried a slight adjustment of the interpretation, illustrated the story a trifle differently. Among these beloved subjects—for there is no doubt that there was love here in the searching, love in the perseverance, faithfulness in adhering to these subjects—are St. Paul, the persecutor and afterwards the persecuted, the great thinker and man of action of the early days of Christianity; the penitent Prodigal, who fascinated Rembrandt; the depiction of the forgiving Father; and finally and above all, Christ, who said, like Rembrandt in painter's language, but 1600 years earlier, that he was the Light of the world.

People have sought the face of Christ for nearly 2000 years and it is a long line that runs from the mosaics of Palermo and Ravenna through Giotto in the Arena Chapel at Padua to Rembrandt's Christ. Even Christ made flesh is still a hidden Christ: ' . . . et quand il a fallu qu'il

Rembrandt

ait paru, il s'est encore plus caché en se couvrant de l'humanité.¹

The sculptors no less than the painters of the early and late Middle Ages, of Renaissance and Baroque, created their visions of Christ in stone and marble, in bronze and wood. They created their representations of a face that they had never seen with the eyes of the body. Surely these artists belong with the Greeks who travelled to Jerusalem in Jesus' time and came to Philip, saying that the object of their journey was to see Jesus.

Rembrandt also tried to imagine him. He could only represent him according to the modalities of his own mind, so that Rembrandt's Christ too remains a limited conception. The artist could not do much more than search in the extensive realms of experience and imagination. He began with a lively, communicative Jesus, speaking, listening, explaining and distinguished from his immediate surroundings by greater dynamic accent in attitude and gesture. A striking example of this is a pen drawing of 1634, washed with bistre, heightened with body-colour and red chalk². Christ is young here, a group of disciples crowds around him, literally spellbound in breathless attention. In the midst of them is John, directly opposite his Master. It is he who receives and absorbs the shining rays from Christ with the greatest intensity. The flow and brilliance of light are too powerful even for this disciple:

¹ Pascal, in a letter to Mlle. de Roannez, October, 1656.

² Teylers Museum, Haarlem.

Christ

his head is bent, his eyelids closed, he breaks down and swoons.

There is great variety in Rembrandt's interpretation of Christ. In the course of years two artistic principles are contrasted, each forming an independent group. They are not consecutive but were present simultaneously in his imagination. They never fuse into a whole. Rembrandt's personality embraced both conceptions. One group of representations of Christ proceeds from the concrete; it is static: the other group springs from the abstract and is dynamic. In other words, Rembrandt's depictions of Christ pass from the material to the spiritual, or conversely from the spiritual to the material. But in both manners of representation he dissociates himself from the vision of the Man of Sorrows, re-created again and again in endless variation by the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. He never used heroic elements for his portrayals. Mainly in his early period, though also in later years, he took Jewish types, Sephardic and Askinazian faces from his immediate surroundings, for the static figure of Christ. He gave them wavy hair reaching to the shoulders, their gaze is meditative and infinitely melancholy, the features gentle. I am thinking here of the Christ of 1648¹; the painting could also be the head of a Jewish citizen from the Bree-straat in Amsterdam. The difference between the head of the young Jew in 1661² and the head of Christ in the

¹ Museum Bredius, The Hague.

² Horne Collection, Montreal.

same year¹ is so slight that one could pass for the other.

Rembrandt was able to study Jewish features every day in his immediate neighbourhood: in the Breestraat alone there lived Daniel Pinto, Salvador Rodriguez, Jacob Belmonte, and the whole of the quarter was overrun by Portuguese, Spanish and Polish Jews. A practised and sharp painter's eye could find any number of heads of Christ among them. But the reproductions of these faces do not represent the Christ figure that was Rembrandt's real gift to humanity. This is in the second group—the face no longer plays an important part—derived from an abstraction, from sentiment and thoughts, it lives in etchings and drawings, on canvases and panels. It is the figure of light in the Hundred Guilder Print, or the Christ bending over the well towards the woman of Samaria, or he who sits at the table at Emmaus. This figure represents neither Jew nor Greek: it is small and of insignificant stature, of almost bewildering unimportance; a person only noticeable for what he is doing or what is expected of him. He pities, he helps, he cures. He is love of one's neighbour personified.

Rembrandt's stubborn and proud nature, passionately fond of fantasy and finery, must each time have trodden a wearisome path to arrive at this conception of Christ. Surely St. Augustine's saying applies here: he has slaughtered human presumption like poultry. Rembrandt belonged to the first generation of the 17th century, which took into account that in and around the towns where

¹ Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

Christ

they could now lead a regular, bourgeois existence, two generations ago there had been murderous fighting: they had heard of the stakes at which human flesh had burnt. The stories of starved and sacked towns might have become less vivid but there were still people to tell them. The recent past often forms the man of today. Furthermore the struggle was still raging within the frontiers and at sea. It may be possible that Rembrandt recollected fighting and cruelty and therefore sought with all the longing of which a soul is capable for a Christ who is above all compassionate. Was not the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, which Rembrandt depicted time and again, for him primarily the reconciler who not only receives the penitent son but goes to meet him with an embrace. 'Father and son, an embrace like a world event'.¹

The meeting between father and son is still dramatic in the etching of 1636. They are clasping each other in their emotion, the son having hastily thrown his staff to the ground: his face is no less tormented than his father's. Thirty-one years later² all the torment at the reunion has passed. A blind father receives his kneeling child. Silent, with closed eyes, the wanderer, clothed in rags and tatters, kneels before his father, his tired head resting against him. The father, in a dark red cloak, receives the repentant vagabond. His searching hands wander and stray over his back, a gesture that is alike an embrace and a blessing. Here something is happening that transcends words.

¹ Schmidt-Degener, Rembrandt.

² Hermitage, Leningrad.

Rembrandt

It is told¹ of this canvas that the Russian workmen who had unpacked it in the Hermitage after the First World War looked at it attentively. One by one they uncovered their heads, made the sign of the cross and knelt down. The anecdote may be true.

Neither the Italian nor the Flemish Renaissance was able to render an insignificant Christ, as poor and humble as the great Healer in the Hundred Guilder Print. It is Christ in the form of a servant which Rembrandt, the lover of pomp in his early years, ventured on as no other painter has, before or after him.

I often wonder if we children of the twentieth century still have a real interest in Rembrandt's two types of Christ. Are the thousands of visitors to the art galleries, who pause for a moment before his canvases, captured by them? It seems to me that Rembrandt's Christ is neither loved nor understood. Only the artistic value is appreciated. The people whose son Rembrandt was is often shy of realistic interpretations of Christ. Calvinism and its sects have caused a good deal of pictorial imagination to wither. I think it is not too bold a statement to add that this withering process is continuing at the present day. Furthermore we are in this sphere directly under the influence of technology, which pursues concrete reality. An iconographic representation of Christ soon makes us shiver in our souls and makes us dumb. Even an Isenheimer altar, painted with blood and tears by the genius Matthias Grünewald, we can admire only for its aesthetic qualities.

¹ Walter Nigg, *Malcr des Ewigen*.

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Does it still arouse religious sentiments, as during its creation? Colmar is not a pilgrim's goal for our religion. It is more as if the sound of music, the most abstract art, particularly music in association with words, has the upper hand of painting here. Does not Bach's Passion Music or a Mozart Mass penetrate deeper into our world of religious feeling than a painting, etching or drawing of a subject from the Gospels? It is undeniable that the hundreds of thousands who listen yearly to Bach's St. Matthew's Passion are moved not merely aesthetically, but deeply in their religious feelings too.

Nevertheless Rembrandt the religious painter's interpretation is not sprung from a different world from that of Bach and Mozart. The genius of all of them was imbued with religious feeling and torment.

Christ and the woman of Samaria is a subject that Rembrandt undertook often and gladly. The Bible story relates that Jesus was on historic ground, the patriarch Jacob's piece of land. At Jacob's Well—and how significant a well is in the East—Jesus was sitting, tired. A woman of Samaria wanted to draw water. Jesus asked her to give him a drink and she was surprised, recognising him as a Jew, for she was only a Samaritan. A bold conversation followed, one speaking a symbolic language which the other did not understand. The woman was speaking of the water in the well, the other about a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life. Jesus revealed himself to the Samaritan, who was a sinful woman.

There is an etching of 1634 on the subject of this story.

Jesus is sitting with a leg somewhat raised on the edge of the well and keeping his balance by leaning on his left arm. The Samaritan woman is busy with the pail and the chain. There is another etching of 1658: Jesus and the woman are almost motionless: one speaking, the other listening. Nothing else is happening. Around them there is a sunny landscape, in the far distance the little town of Sichar in Samaria. It is as if everything is pulsating in gentle evening light, the moment of the day that always charmed Rembrandt, because the low light then spreads over people and things.

Another subject loved by Rembrandt is Christ raising Lazarus. There is a thinly brushed oil-painting¹: Christ, a figure of larger proportions than the bystanders, has his right arm raised. He does not evince power but inner strength. The bystanders are amazed or rigid with fear. Lazarus seems scarcely awakened from his deathly trance. He seems tired and emaciated. There are only the first dragging movements, scarcely noticeable, showing that life is flowing into him again. The loud voice has cried, 'Lazarus, come forth': the sound of the voice still seems to echo in the thin brush strokes.

Rembrandt was continually tackling this subject. In 1632 he made a painting of it², a study in red chalk for a painting³ and later an etching⁴. Always possessed as he

¹ Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

² Art Institute, Chicago.

³ British Museum.

⁴ Boymans Museum, Rotterdam.

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was by the frontiers of life here and life beyond the frontiers, it is understandable that this Gospel story in particular, in which Christ overcomes Death in the presence of eye-witnesses, constantly occupied his mind. Although Christ is full of inner strength, pathos is avoided; also every theatrical gesture that in this of all subjects could so easily lead to spurious emotion.

The growth of the conception, so clear to follow in the consecutive states of the etchings, is from tumult to tranquility in the representation of Christ. The figure becomes more lonely and deserted. In the etching *Ecce Homo*, Christ shown to the people, he stands with a humble white cloth round his loins, in a fine upright posture, the feet firmly planted on the ground. The course of the painter's development can be followed in eight stages. Rembrandt got rid of more and more people, it became calmer around Christ. The mob is finally only a small group of people left and right, the foreground being empty. Lonely, ever lonelier, Christ stands, with the hands fettered crosswise, on the steps.

Who is Rembrandt's Christ, we ask? The question is justified since Rembrandt meditated on him and conceived him in his work all his life. One of the most profound answers is the *Hundred Guilder Print*, the etching of about 1649. It is said that Rembrandt would not sell a copy for less than 100 guilders. The etching does not represent any particular story, it is more a summary of Jesus' life on earth; healing the sick, comforting the sorrowing and giving conclusive answers to doubters and

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erudite pedants. A crowd of people of all kinds has collected round Christ. On the left are the scribes and Pharisees, listening with great attention; some of them are mocking and sceptical, a few of them with extremely refined features. The needle must here have had an inimitably fine touch; each face, given in outline, looks like a miniature drawing. One noble face and figure shows a speaking likeness to Erasmus; he is listening with deep attention. The disciple on Christ's left—is it Peter?—undoubtedly has Socrates' head. The young man who had great possessions is seated, sunk in oppressive thought, supporting his head in his left hand. On the right is a group of the wretched. A hesitating woman is being dragged forward by her child; in the foreground another woman, with a small sick creature in her arms, is boldly mounting the steps which bring her to the helper. It is remarkable that most light falls on the group to the left, those who know but do not yet believe. The group on the right, the sufferers, are immersed in shadow. One is lying, another sitting, leaning on crutches; a child is stretched out on a wheelbarrow, an old blind man is being led. A woman—what a beautiful figure—kneels with her hands in the attitude of prayer; in front of her there is a man imploring with raised arms. He is close to the radiant figure of Christ, whose robe is brilliant white, and his beseeching arms throw a dark shadow on it. Christ is here a small figure, by no means the imposing figure of the other etching, Lazarus' return from the dead: this Christ is really insignificant and unimportant. The rays

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of light round his head are etched in such fine-drawn lines that they have almost become a filigree jewel of beams. Christ's right hand, on the side of the sceptics, is held low and open; the left hand, with the fingers full of nervous energy, is held up. He stands there waiting and almost motionless, on a raised part of the road, from which he can see all the bystanders. He is here neither priest nor prophet, Lord of Glory nor ruler; a dim figure, a helper from whom only comprehensive compassion emanates.

This conception is far from the super-terrestrial gentleness painted by Giotto or the heavenly glory conceived by Fra Angelico; nor does this face possess the intelligence of the faces of Christ in the work of Hieronymus Bosch. Rembrandt's Christ is conspicuous in nothing save infinite love of men. Rembrandt dispensed with the beautiful exterior, making only the sense of holiness felt in the depiction of Christ.

Rembrandt never made it easy for himself to realise his inspiration. There must have been inward struggles before he came to the purest truth. He worked hard on the different states of the Hundred Guild - Print. The first state in the British Museum has sharp contrasts; the second is made softer and lighter, so that the left-hand group seems more marked. The cheek and neck of the kneeling woman in the right-hand group have been etched again. There must be about twenty-five prints of the second state, of which the best I have seen was at the Bonnat Museum at Bayonne. Unburdened and without sin stands the Son of God and of man in this etching,

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lonely, almost deserted, faced by a turbulent crowd. Is this small figure the invincible, the strong one, the beholder wonders at first? Thus is the most spiritual conception of Christ by Rembrandt. No different are the Christ before Pilate (1636), preaching (1652), and the already mentioned etching *Ecce Homo* (1625) in all its states of working.

Time and again Rembrandt tried to remove the Son of man in the form of a servant from all dialectic, from the least trace of pathos, from the tumult of the world, placing him in the world of pure neighbourly love belonging to him, built up on the foundation of humility.

Rembrandt's Christology unfolds itself perhaps equally profoundly and clearly in the many times that he presents the story of Emmaus, as told by St. Luke. These lines constantly inspired his mind, they must have captivated him. Only a renewed conception could liberate him.

He returned time after time to the Emmaus story, in fresh introspection, just as he tackled the subject of the Prodigal Son again and again. Emmaus and the Prodigal were part of the silent, largely hidden life of his heart. He could never come to the end of thinking of their significance; the meaning of these two Gospel stories was for him infinite. The last conception was superseded by a new, improved interpretation; fresh contemplation shifted the moment he had crystallised, or the accent in that moment, or the atmosphere in that accent. While searching and groping he discovered truth after truth. The important

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thing was to seize them, for even the greatest inspiration, the deepest vision, are not permanent guests in our minds. They come unexpectedly and flee away without our knowing. He built up a new composition differently, made light and shade speak differently, giving colour and glow another language, rearranging tints. Once he lets Jesus walk behind the two disciples, travelling the threescore furlongs from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They are so filled with the sensational events which have just happened, a crucifixion and a resurrection, that they hardly notice him. Christ is incognito and Rembrandt, faithful to the text, refrains from giving him a halo.

In an earlier drawing the three men have arrived at their destination, Emmaus. The unknown man makes as though he would have gone further, but they invite him to stay, for it is toward evening, the day is spent. It is the little moment just before the recognition. Rembrandt's deepest emotion in this story, however, is the infinitesimal moment of recognition: the birth of full understanding. The three men are sitting at an inn table. Christ, in the middle, breaks bread. Then the eyes of the disciples were opened, as the evangelist tells in simplicity which cannot be improved on. The disciples see, they know, they understand. In 1630¹ the stranger sitting at the table is still imposing in his upright posture. The wooden wall behind him is white with his blinding light. Four years later there is a small etching; the meal is almost homely; there is a dog by the table, waiting for crumbs and pieces.

¹ Jacquemart-Andre, Paris.

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There are two oil-paintings of 1648,¹ in which Christ as the third person is also seen frontally. He is placed in an atmosphere of intangibility, recognition has just taken place; one disciple has his hands in an attitude of prayer, the other is spellbound with uttermost amazement. The servant stands outside the transcendence of the revelation. There is an oil-painting of 1661.² Christ has remarkably dark hair. The men are at table before an open window: the halo round Christ's head is a few points of light.

What did Emmaus mean to Rembrandt? The question reaches far. If we give a detailed answer we shall become entangled in what we shall never get to know. Emmaus is by no means merely a motif for him, but indeed an avowal, an expression of the heavenly, hidden in the everyday. One drawing of the travellers to Emmaus is alone in the great series.³ It is after the recognition. In the fraction of a heartbeat the natural and the supernatural have met. The two disciples are speechless, one raising the right hand in urgent prayer, the other jumping up from his place, dumbfounded. They are staring at the place where the stranger, Christ, had just been sitting. The chair is empty, irradiated with phosphorescent sparkle, blazing and burning: there are strokes in it, half star, half cross. Christ? He has vanished.

What could Rembrandt give but a trail of light? Beyond the luminous even the painter of light could not go.

¹ Statens Museum, Copenhagen; Louvre, Paris.

² Louvre, Paris.

³ Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

- 1602 The States-General forbids all residents to sail to the Indies otherwise than in the service of the Company.
- 1606 July 15. *Rembrandt van Rijn* born at Leiden. Father *Harmen Gerritsz. van Rijn*, miller; mother *Neeltjen Willemsd. van Zuytbroeck*, daughter of a baker.
Spinola captures Grol.
- 1609 The Twelve Years' Truce.
- 1610 The Amsterdam civic authorities decide upon great extensoin of the town. The Herengracht to be widened. Plans for digging the Keizers- and Prinsengracht, to support the quays on piles and to wall them.
- 1616 Death of Shakespeare
- 1618 Outbreak of 'Thirty Years' War in Germany.
November 13. Synod of Dordrecht opened. Gerbrandt Adriansz. Bredero, poet, died.
- 1619 Johan van Oldenbarnevelt beheaded. Lifelong imprisonment for Hugo Grotius, international jurist and reformer.
- 1620 The Mayflower sailed from England.
Entered as a student at Leiden University. Pupil in Jacob van Swanenburgh's studio.
Beginning of the building of the Westerkerk, Amsterdam, to plans by Hendrik de Keyser.
- 1621 Death of Hendrik de Keyser, designer of the Oude- West- and Noorderkerk in Amsterdam.
Escape of Hugo Grotius.
Spanish siege of Gulik.
No renewal of the Truce. Resumption of the war.
- 1622 Spanish siege of Steenberg and Bergen-op-Zoom.
- 1623 *To Pieter Lastman's studio in Amsterdam.*
Back to Leiden. Cooperation with Lievens.
Conspiracy against Prince Maurits.

Chronological Table

- 1624 Spanish siege of Breda.
- 1625 Frederick Hendrik becomes Stadhouder. Breda falls to the Spanish.
Death of Jan Breughel the Elder.
Vondel's 'Palamedes, or Murdered Innocence'.
- 1626 Oldenzaal retaken.
- 1627 Death of Lieven de Key, Haarlem town builder.
Grol retaken.
Vondel's 'Capture of Grol'.
- 1628 Piet Hein captures a Spanish treasure fleet.
- 1629 Frederik Hendrik takes Bois le Duc. The Spaniards invade the Veluwe, part of Guelders.
Hooft's 'Lament of the Princess of Orange for the Battle of Bois le Duc'.
- 1630 *Death of Rembrandt's father.*
- 1631 *Removal to Amsterdam.*
Conspiracy in the Spanish Netherlands. Vain attempts by Grotius to settle in his native country.
- 1632 *Rembrandt meets Saskia van Uylenburg.*
Campaign along the Meuse. Venlo, Roermond, Maastricht recaptured.
- 1633 *Huygens' commission to paint Passion scenes for Frederik Hendrik.*
Joan Maurits van Nassau's palace in The Hague begun by Pieter Post, to the design of Jacob van Campen.
- 1634 *Marriage with Saskia van Uylenburg.*
- 1635-1636 Plague in Amsterdam.
- 1637 Boom in the tulip trade.
Vondel's 'Gijsbrecht van Aemstel'.
- 1638 Death of Paulus Moreelse.
- 1639 *Purchase of a house in Breestraat.*
Adriaan Brouwer dies.
Sea battle at Duins.

Chronological Table

- 1640 *Death of Rembrandt's mother.*
Hercules Seghers dies.
Marriage of Prince Willem with Princess Mary of England.
- 1641 *Rembrandt's son Titus born.*
Death of Anton van Dijck.
Vondel turns Roman Catholic.
- 1642 July 14. *Death of Saskia.*
- 1644 Pieter Post completes the palace for Joan Maurits van Nassau at The Hague.
- 1645 *Hendrickje Stoffels joins Rembrandt's family.*
Frederik Hendrik takes Hulst.
Death of Hugo Grotius at Rostock.
- 1646 The Republic takes part in the Peace Negotiations at Munster.
- 1647 Death of Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft.
Vondel's 'Leeuwendalers'.
- 1648 Peace of Munster. End of the Eighty Years' War.
First pile driven for the new Town Hall. Builder Jacob van Campen.
- 1649 Execution of Charles I of England.
- 1650 The States of Holland stand the troops down. Counter-resolutions by the States-General. Attack on Amsterdam.
Death of Prince Willem II.
Prince Willem III born.
Period without a Stadhouder begins.
- 1652 First war against England begins.
- 1654 Death of Paulus Potter and Carel Fabritius.
End of the first war against England.
Vondel's 'Lucifer'.
Abdication of Queen Christina of Sweden and accession of Charles X.
- 1655 Northern war.
Vondel's 'Dedication of the Town Hall'.

Chronological Table

- 1655-1656 Plague in Amsterdam.
- 1656 *Rembrandt declared insolvent.*
Dutch merchants freed in Danzig.
Death of Jacob van Campen and Jan van Goyen.
Spinoza expelled from the Jewish community in Amsterdam.
- 1657 War with Portugal.
- 1659 *Public sale of the estate. Removal to a house on the Rozengracht.*
Hendrickje and Titus start an art dealer's business.
Vondel's 'Jephthah'.
- 1660 Death of Velasquez, Govert Flinck, Quiringh Brekelendam.
Pieter Post completes the Assembly Hall of the States-General at 'The Hague'.
Michiel de Ruyter ennobled by Denmark.
Restoration of the English Monarchy.
- 1661 *Transfer of Rembrandt's house to creditors.*
Peace with Portugal. Brazil ceded.
- 1663 July 24. *Death of Hendrickje Stoffels. Buried in the Westerkerk.*
- 1663-1664 Bubonic Plague in Amsterdam.
- 1664 Vondel's 'Adam in Exile'.
- 1665 Second war with England.
- 1666 Four days' naval battle at North Foreland and two days' battle at Dunkirk. The English burn 120 merchant ships and plunder the island of Terschelling.
Death of Frans Hals.
Fire of London.
Molières 'Le Misanthrope'.
- 1667 *Titus marries Magdalena van Loo.*
- 1668 *Death of Titus.*
Triple Alliance between England, Sweden and the Republic.
- 1669 *Titia, child of Titus and Magdalena, born. October 4th: Rembrandt van Rijn dies. He is buried in the Westerkerk, Amsterdam. Place unknown.*

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